

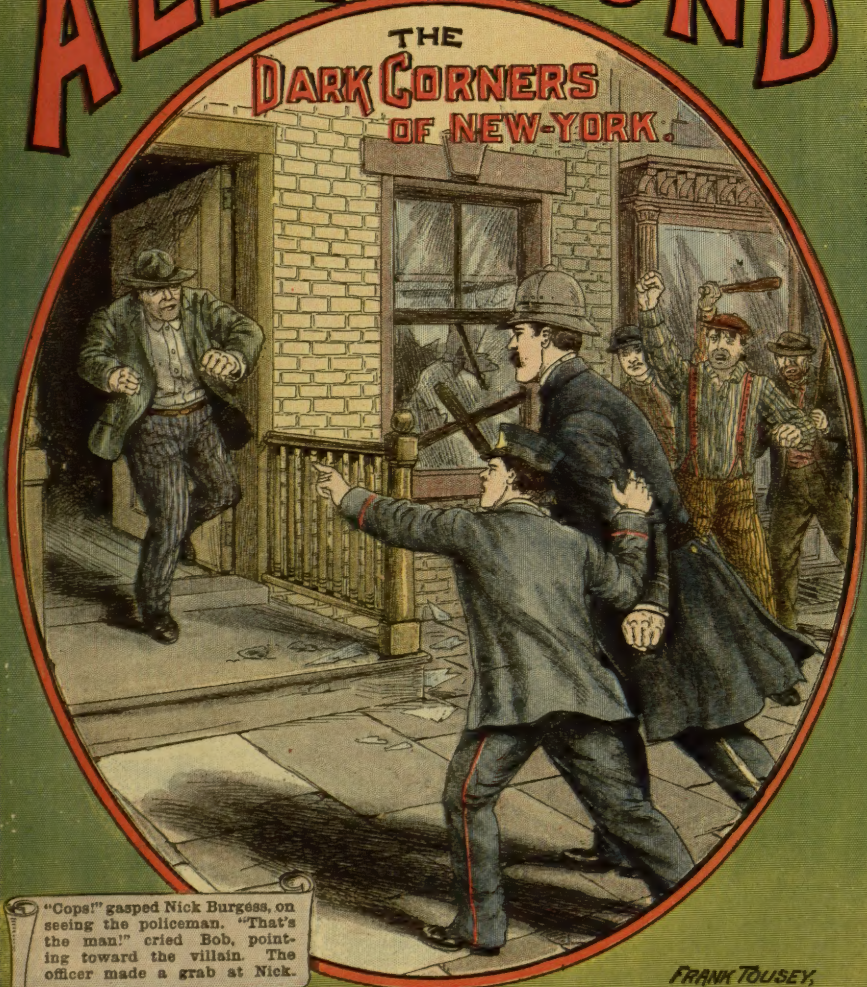
No. 7.

December 10, 1909.

Price 5 Cents.

ALL AROUND

THE
DARK CORNERS
OF NEW-YORK.



"Cops!" gasped Nick Burgess, on seeing the policeman. "That's the man!" cried Bob, pointing toward the villain. The officer made a grab at Nick.

WEEKLY.

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ALL AROUND WEEKLY

CONTAINING STORIES OF ALL KINDS

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NEW YORK, DECEMBER 10, 1909.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

THE DARK CORNERS OF NEW YORK

OR,

THE PERILS OF A DISTRICT TELEGRAPH MESSENGER

By H. K. SHACKLEFORD

CHAPTER I.

"NUMBER TWELVE."

It was late in the afternoon.

One of the Broadway offices of the Western Union Telegraph Company had received an unusual number of messages for delivery in that section of the city. The messengers attached to the office were kept busy running in every direction, their dark uniforms being seen dodging in and out, here and there, pushing and shoving in the throng of pedestrians, delivering telegrams with machine-like promptness.

Inside the office sat some half-dozen youths in trim, well-fitting uniforms, waiting for calls to duty, and ready to dart away at a moment's notice.

"Number 12!" called a clerk behind the office railing.

Instantly a lithe, active youth sprang forward and received his book containing two dispatches for delivery. He glanced up at the office clock, buttoned up his coat to the chin, looked at the address on the yellow envelope a moment, and then darted away like a baseballist on the home-stretch.

It was a cold, wintry day, and a chilling, drizzling rain had begun to fall. But Robert Percival—the name of "Number 12"—heeded it not. Plunging through slush and snow, pushing his way through the throng, he delivered one of the messages in a Broadway store, and then hurried away toward University Place to deliver the other.

"Mr. Uriah Gibbs," he muttered, looking at the address, "No. — University Place. Private residence, I guess."

In a few moments he was ringing the doorbell of Uriah Gibbs' residence.

"Telegram for Mr. Gibbs," he remarked, as the servant, a bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked lass from Killarney, opened the door.

"Shure, an' isn't it from Mike?" she asked, her face flushing, and eyes sparkling like ebony diamonds.

"I don't know," replied Bob, smiling; "it's for Mr. Gibbs."

"Och, but me Mike is a broth of a bye! I'll be afther tellin' Mr. Gibbs," and hurrying away, she left him standing in the hallway waiting for the appearance of Mr. Gibbs.

"Eh! a message for me, did you say, Bridget?" said an elderly gentleman, coming forward in a dressing gown, pipe in hand, looking the picture of a man at peace with himself and all the world.

"For Mr. Uriah Gibbs," said Bob, handing the dispatch and book together to the gentleman.

Mr. Gibbs, as nine out of ten men do, opened the envelope before receipting for it in the messenger's book, and proceeded to read it. As he glanced over the few lines he started and paled.

"Great earthquakes!" he exclaimed, turning white as a sheet, holding out the telegram at arm's length before him. "What can this mean! 'See Sam Bowler at No. — Water Street, and put him off, or I am lost.—Sinclair Gibbs.' What in creation is the matter now, I wonder? Something wrong, or Sinclair never would have sent this. Well—well—I'll see him this very night, and—"

"Please sign your name here, sir, and let me go," said Robert, presenting the book again.

"Yes, oh, yes, I forgot," and taking the book, he signed his name and noted the hour of its reception. Bob put the book in his pocket and his cap on his head and withdrew.

On reaching the street again, he hurried toward Broadway, and soon reached the office, where he turned in his book to the manager and took his seat among the other messengers waiting for calls.

Messengers were coming and going all the time, and as each number was called in rotation, each knew when his turn would come. The boys talked in low tones about the incidents of their trip as they came, careful not to make any noise that would disturb the operators at their work.

Twice was "Number 12" called and sent flying out with messages. Night came on, cold, rainy and cheerless, and still the incessant rapping and ticking of the galvanic batteries went on and messages flowed in. Bob came in quite wet, and chilled to the marrow. Ere his turn came again he had thoroughly dried and warmed himself, and began to feel like a business man again. But business slackened, and it was nearly nine o'clock before he was called out again.

"Number 12!"

Bob nimbly stepped forward, received his book, and found only one dispatch in it.

"Sam Bowler, No. — Water Street," was the address as he read it.

The next moment he hurried out, buttoning up his coat, and adjusting his rubber cape, which he had now put on, and hastening toward the Bowery.

"No. — Water Street," he muttered to himself. "Bad place—one of the dark corners of New York. Guess I won't find 'em singin' hymns and prayin' down there—oh, no! Playing cards and guzzling tangle-leg juice is all they do down there."

He soon reached the street and turned to examine the numbers. The number he was in search of was two blocks up.

The first glimpse at the place made him shudder with disgust. Ribald songs and low jests resounded on every side.

Boldly entering the barroom, Bob made directly for the counter, behind which stood the burly barkeeper.

"A telegram for Mr. Sam Bowler," he said to the barkeeper. "Where is he?"

The barkeeper leaned over the counter, looked at the address on the envelope, and shook his head.

"He isn't here?" Bob asked.

"No."

"Don't know where he is?"

"Didn't say that. I'll take it to him," replied the suspicious barkeeper.

"That won't do, sir. I must take it back if I can't find him."

The barkeeper frowned.

"Here," he half whispered, leaning over the counter again. "Sam is busy, and don't want to be disturbed. You leave it here, and he'll get it all right."

"That may be so, sir, but it would be a violation of the rules of the company to do so," said Bob, placing the dispatch in the book again.

"Ain't yer a little too fresh, youngster?" asked the barkeeper.

"Ah, no; I've been salted down long ago. Don't play me for a flat. I won't bite, mister."

"Then look hyer—Sara is engaged with a gentleman, and don't like to be disturbed; but you go through that there door," pointing toward a small door in the rear of the bar, "and go up the stairs on the outside, follow the balcony to the end, knock on the door there, and Sam will come out to yer, and chuck yer over the railin' for disturbin' him."

"If he doesn't kill me, I'll have him arrested if he does," said Bob, making for the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" softly chuckled the barkeeper, "cute boy, that, but he hain't had his eyeteeth cut in the dark corners of New York yet, that's plain. Wonder who can be sendin' telegrams to Sam, eh? The old thing! Here it is," and shoving a bottle of cheap brandy toward a red-nosed, seedy looking customer with one hand, held out the other for the money.

Following the instructions given him by the barkeeper, Bob passed through the door and found himself at the foot of a rickety flight of stairs, a glimpse of which he got through the open doorway. When the door was closed upon him he was enveloped in total darkness.

"By jingo!" muttered Bob, "they call this part of the city one of the dark corners of New York, and I guess they don't lie about it, either, for it's so dark I can't see my nose. Guess I can feel my way up. He said go to the end of the balcony and knock on the door. Here goes," and catching hold of the railing or banister of the rickety stairs, he cautiously ascended to the top.

At the head of the stairs he stopped and peered around in the darkness. By this time his eyes were more serviceable than at first. He could see the dim outlines of the buildings in the rear of the house. As he followed along the narrow balcony he noticed a low, wooden shanty, the roof of which did not reach quite as high as the floor of the balcony.

Everything was dark and silent. Only now and then a faint sound of revelry came up from the barroom below. But intent only on finding his man, Bob pushed on toward the end of the balcony, stepping cautiously and feeling his way as a guard against accidents.

At last he reached the end of the balcony, which projected over the roof of the shanty below, and there halted to search for the door the bartender said he would find there.

"That was a confounded sell!" he muttered to himself. "I don't believe there is any door here—it must be some sort of a jumping-off place. Ah! I hear somebody talking inside there—coming, too!"

Bob barely had time to step back toward the extreme end of the balcony and crouch against the side of the house when a door opened and a man stepped out and hurried along the balcony. Bob saw him enter the barroom by the way he had come.

"Hello!" he mentally ejaculated; "you may have been my man! I'll go after him and see if—what's that, I wonder?"

A slight noise inside attracted his attention. He pushed the door ajar and peered into the room. While it was dark in there, it was much lighter than outside by reason of rays of light that came under and over an inner door

at the other end of the room. Hearing voices in there, Bob noiselessly advanced and listened a minute.

CHAPTER II.

A DARK DEED.

"I tell you once for all, Mr. Bowler," Bob heard a voice say, "I won't do it. I am willing to pay you one thousand, and not a cent more. If you are not satisfied with that, the courts of law may take it into their hands."

"Ha, ha, ha! the courts of law!" chuckled another, whose voice made the young messenger's blood run cold in his veins. "Me an' the courts parted long ago. We differed about some little matter, and since that time I have had nothing to do with them. I settle my business myself, and must have ten thousand down, or the jig is up with Sinclair Gibbs."

"But how will you escape if he goes to the courts?"

"The courts be hanged. I tell you, I settle my own business, Uriah Gibbs."

Bob applied his eye to the keyhole, and, to his amazement, saw Uriah Gibbs, to whom he had delivered a telegram in the afternoon of that day, sitting at a small deal table, facing a villainous looking man across it.

A candle burned flickeringly in the room, revealing to the astonished messenger the presence of a pile of money on the little table between the two men.

"So you will not take my offer, then?" said Gibbs, laying his hand on the money as if to protect it.

"No; ten thousand or nothing!" growled the other.

"Then I may as well go," and laying the other hand on the money, he was in the act of taking it up, when a man with a soft, cat-like tread, crept from behind a screen and raised a glittering blade quickly above his head.

With a soul filled with horror Bob shrieked at the top of his voice:

"Hi—there!"

The next instant he felt himself seized from behind and hurled through the door, landing with a crash on the roof of the shanty just below the balcony.

"Oh, heavens, I'm smashed all to pieces!" he groaned, trying to pick himself up to see if he was all together.

He listened.

Profound silence reigned.

He arose to his feet and essayed to walk. His foot slipped on the roof and he went down with a crash again.

The rotten timbers creaked under him.

"By jingo—the old thing is going down with me!" he muttered. "Just let me get out of this and Bowler may whistle for his dispatch. You don't catch me in this dark corner of the city again at night—somebody's coming!"

Bob lay flat on the roof and listened.

Two men came out on the little balcony and held a whispered conversation for a few minutes.

"Are you sure?" he heard one ask.

"Yes—I pitched him out here head first—guess it broke his neck."

"Broke nothing; you'll find him out on the roof there. Run down and watch the yard while I go over the roof."

"The brat must not get away, or there'll be a hornet's nest turned loose on us."

One of the villains crept along the balcony and down the rickety stairs to the yard below.

"All right!" came up in a low tone of voice from below.

"Keep your eyes peeled, then," said the other, carefully letting himself down on the roof of the shanty.

The timbers creaked under his weight as he stepped forward from the balcony.

"Whatever shall I do?" groaned Bob. "I wish the old thing would tumble and smash them both," and crawling noiselessly toward the further side of the house, he lay still and motionless, watching the black figure moving cautiously along the roof.

The nearer the villain came the more the rotten timbers creaked and groaned, causing dry dust to puff up through the crevices. Bob held his nose to prevent a sneeze, but in vain.

It came with a half-smothered explosion.

"Ah, you infernal spy!" hissed the man, making a flying leap toward our hero.

The roof shook, trembled a moment, and then went down with a crash, carrying Bob and Bowler with it.

CHAPTER III.

THE WRECK OF THE SHANTY—THE MESSENGER IN TROUBLE.

A volley of oaths and a half-smothered yell of rage escaped the two villains, as the roof of the shanty went down with a crash.

"Ten thousand furies on the kid!" hissed Sam Bowler, as a cloud of dust from the wreck set him violently coughing and sneezing.

"Yes!" growled the other. "But it can't be helped. Look out for the kid!"

"Atchew!" came a half-smothered, boyish sneeze from a corner of the wreck.

"There! That's him! Catch him! Stamp his life out!"

"Where is the—atthew!—Darn the dust! Catch him, Nick!"

The noise of the crash alarmed the inmates of the saloon, and the little door at the foot of the stairs was thrown open. A red glare of light streamed across the yard, followed by nearly a score of rum-soaked men and women, all eager to know what had occurred. Several lanterns were brought out, thus revealing the wreck, with Bowler enveloped in a cloud of dust.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled an old, red-nosed toper. "The old shanty is down at last! Who sets up the drinks?"

"'Nother ole lan' mark gone!" said another.

"Watcher lookin' for, Sam?" asked a third, seeing Bowler busily searching among the wreck for something.

"None of your (atchew) business!" growled Sam, lifting a piece of timber that supported a portion of the roof.

Nick darted under, and a moment later whispered:

"I've got him!"

"Hallo!" cried Bob, as Nick dragged him out from under the wreck. "Are you Mr. Sam Bowler?"

"No. Why?"

"Because I've got a message here for him," replied Bob, producing book and message.

"Why in thunder didn't you say so before?" hissed Bowler, snatching the dispatch from his hand.

"I did," said Bob; "but before I could finish, somebody fired me out like I was a spitball."

"Who fired you out?"

"Hanged if I know. I was bounced quicker'n lightning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the barkeeper. "I told you he'd bounce you."

"But you didn't tell me he'd tear down the whole house," replied Bob. "Hanged if you don't need some strait-jackets around here. Sign for that message, and presenting the book to Bowler, he seemed perfectly indifferent to the danger that menaced him."

Bowler never noticed the book, but asked:

"Say, how'd you find your way up there?"

"The barkeeper told me how to find the door to your room."

"The infernal fool!" hissed Bowler, in a foaming rage. "I'll smash his soft-shell head for 'im, as sure as my name is Bowler. I say, boy, I'm sorry you got bounced out. Hope you ain't hurt?"

"No; but I don't like such free lunches—I don't," said Bob.

"Well, come with me, and I'll pay you for the message."

"No charges, sir; all paid," said Bob, again presenting the book for his signature.

"I'll give you something for your grand bounce."

"Don't want anything," said Bob. "That was a free blowout," and, backing toward the back entrance of the barroom, added, "and I don't want any more in mine."

"Here, you young duffer!" hissed Nick Burgess, seizing him by the shoulder and roughly pushing him toward Bowler, "go 'long with 'im, and get your pay."

"Yes, and set 'em up like a little man all 'round," said an old toper in the crowd, as they all turned and re-entered the saloon.

But Bob had seen enough to warn him that it would be fatal to let the two villains get him in their power. Watching his chance, he suddenly darted away from Nick Burgess, and sprang through the open door with the nimbleness of a squirrel. In a moment he was in the center of the room.

"Darnation!" hissed Nick, springing forward in hot pursuit. "Stop that kid—stop the thief!"

Not one moved a hand to intercept him.

They were all thieves.

Whom should they stop?

Nick discovered his mistake in an instant, and cried out:

"A spy—a spy—stop him!"

In a flash a dozen men sprang forward and cut off his retreat to the door. Bob's blood was up now. He darted between the knees of an inflated rum guzzler, and sent him sprawling on the floor with a force that shook the house.

In an instant nearly a dozen others piled on top of him, thinking the young spy was underneath.

"Git off! Oh, gosh blame it—help. Murder! Help—oh!" came from the struggling man like Bedlamite music.

Bob made for the door again.

Somebody had locked it.

Nick Burgess darted toward him. Seeing a window, Bob knew it was his only hope. He rushed toward it, Nick Burgess in hot pursuit.

"Last chance!" muttered Bob, making a flying leap, go-

ing headforemost through the window, scattering glass like hail around him.

"Hullo!" cried a policeman, seizing the messenger as he picked himself up. "What's all this, eh?"

"Number 12," gasped Bob, uncertain whether he was all there or not.

"And who the deuce is Number 12?"

"Telegraph messenger," explained Bob in just two words.

"Oh, yes, I see," said the policeman, looking at his uniform for the first time.

"Fired out, eh?"

"Cops!" gasped Nick Burgess, on seeing the policeman.

"That's the man!" cried Bob, pointing toward the villain. "Catch him—he's the man!"

The officer made a grab at Nick. Nick wheeled and dashed into the house again.

"Smash him! Down with the cop! Kill the spy!" cried Bowler, making a bold rush, and attempting to seize Bob by the arm.

Whack! went the locust on his head, staggering him for a moment.

The next moment he closed with the officer, and a terrible struggle commenced.

The officer had no friends in that crowd. It was a free fight for everybody who wished to put in a blow, and the officer received many a thump from front and rear.

"Whoop!" yelled Nick Burgess, on seeing that the officer had no friends in the crowd; "down with the cop—catch the kid!"

Fighting like a tiger, the brave policeman gave way inch by inch, dealing terrible blows right and left with his club, until at last a stone mug was hurled at his head with such force that he reeled and fell into the gutter.

Bob instantly took to his heels, running down the street toward Fulton Ferry. So deeply engaged were the crowd in the fight with the officer that only two young toughs saw him leave and at once gave chase.

The young messenger ran for his life—fear lending wings to his feet—and he soon outdistanced them.

It was so common to see a messenger hurrying through the streets of the city, that nothing was thought of one running at full speed.

But he met with a check, however, from a woman.

Women are said to be often at the bottom of man's troubles, and in this instance Bob thought there was a great deal of truth in the saying.

Just as he turned the corner of the street, going at full speed, he ran against a female with such force that they rolled into the street together.

"Help! Thieves—murder—help!" screamed the terrified woman, kicking in every direction.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Bob, scrambling to his feet, trying, at the same time, to assist her.

But she, thinking he was either trying to murder or rob her, kicked, screamed, and fought like a wild cat.

"Thieves—murder—police!" she yelled, frantically.

"I'm killed and robbed of everything—help—help!"

"Accept your rats, ma'am," said Bob, picking up those mysterious articles of feminine embellishment and handing them to her.

"Oh, you wretch—you horrid thief!" she cried, seizing him. "Police—police!"

"Here! What's all this row about?" asked a stalwart knight of the locust, running up to the irate female, who was belaboring the messenger with the hair rats.

"He's a thief!" she screamed.

"I ain't," protested Bob.

"You are—you tried to rob me of—of——"

"What—your rats? You have them in your hands, ma'am," said the officer.

She looked at him a moment, and then at the rats. A light broke over her face, as if she had just begun to appreciate the situation. "Oh, your horrid wretch!" she cried, darting away toward the ferry, leaving Bob to the tender mercies of the policeman.

"What's all this about?" the officer asked, turning to Bob, as a crowd began to gather around them.

"I was running down the street here, sir," Bob said, "and ran into her, on my way back to the office. We both fell together and she screamed like all possessed."

"I should say she did," said the officer, smiling. "But you must keep the brakes on, or we'll have to run you in."

"All right, I'll check up," said Bob, turning away.

"See that you do—move on, gentlemen!"

"I say," said Bob, turning to the officer again, "there's a row up Water Street there, and they're beating an officer all to pieces. Better go and help him."

"That's off my beat," muttered the officer, leisurely strolling toward the river.

The messenger said no more but started toward Broadway again, glad to have escaped the perils that menaced him.

He walked briskly along, wondering if the old gentleman had really been murdered, when, just as he passed a corner, a dark form darted out and dealt him a blow that flashed a million stars before his eyes. He reeled, clutched the air, and fell senseless to the pavement.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH BOB FALLS INTO A TRAP AND THE HANDS OF THE VILLAINS.

On recovering consciousness Bob found himself lying on the ground and a policeman shaking him by the shoulder, as if trying to wake him out of a sound sleep.

"I say, youngster," called the officer, "I don't want to run you in, but if you don't get up and shoot for home I'll have to do it."

"Eh? What did you say?" asked Bob, confusedly looking around, as if trying to locate himself.

"Get up and go home. You're too young for such rackets as this."

"My head—gee, how it hurts!" groaned the young messenger, putting both hands to his head.

"Yes, guess it does," said the policeman. "It'll feel as big as a barrel in the morning. Can't you stand up?"

"Somebody hit me," said Bob, trying to steady himself.

"Hello! You're covered with blood!"

"Somebody hit me," repeated Bob, looking at his hand, which was covered with blood.

"Who did it? How did it happen?"

"Don't know. A man darted out from the corner there and knocked me down," replied Bob.

"Haven't been drinking, eh?"

"Not a drop—never do."

"That's strange. You must be badly hurt. Can you walk?"

Bob reeled and staggered a few steps, and then braced up quite steady. He was gaining his strength rapidly.

"Oh, yes, I can walk," he said, "though my head hurts awfully."

"I guess so. I'll take you to the Chambers Street Hospital and see——"

"No; I'd rather go to the office first," said Bob, "and hand in my book."

"Well, where is the office?"

"On Broadway, above —— Street."

The kind-hearted and considerate officer carried him to the office on Broadway, followed by a large crowd, which gathered numbers as they moved along. Bob's bloody appearance attracting attention, and exciting any amount of sympathy.

When they entered the office, the messengers, clerks and operators were astonished at his appearance.

"Why, how did it happen, Robert?" asked the dumfounded manager of the office.

"I went down to Water Street, sir," replied Bob, dropping into a seat, "to deliver that message, and——"

"Did you deliver it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who hurt you?"

"I don't know. Somebody struck me on the head."

"In Water Street?"

"No, sir—Beekman Street."

"Well, it looks like a bad hurt. You had better go home."

"Better wash the blood off first," suggested the officer.

Two of the messengers soon had his head clear of the clotted gore.

"I don't believe it's so bad, after all," Bob remarked after the bathing was finished, feeling the wound tenderly.

"You were struck with an instrument that cut the scalp and stunned you, that's all," said the officer, examining the wound.

"Hanged if it wasn't a hard one, though," said Bob; "but I feel better, anyway."

"I'll leave you here, then," said the policeman, as he started to leave the office.

Bob quickly took his hand, saying:

"I am so much obliged to you, sir. My name is Robert Percival, and——"

"Oh, that's all right," and the officer gave him a hearty shake of the hand as he passed out on the street.

Bob lingered about the office until he felt well and strong again—able to walk home.

It was ten o'clock when he left the office and started up Broadway.

Just as he reached the corner of Broadway and Fourth Street, he heard the alarm of fire, and stopped to count the strokes of the bell.

"Downtown," he said, and then turned to resume his walk home.

Clang—clang—clang! rang out the firebells again, and again he stopped to listen and look about.

Down Broadway a red glare of light shot up, as the

fire fiend burst through the roof and windows of a large establishment.

"My heavens!" gasped a portly looking man, as he dashed past him, "the whole block will go! I am a ruined man!"

Crowds of people now rushed past the telegraph messenger, all hurrying toward the scene of the conflagration, the red glare of light illuminating their excited faces with vivid clearness, even at that distance.

Bob began to get excited himself, and was debating within his mind whether or not he should turn back, when a wild shout, and a rushing noise behind, caused him to turn in that direction.

"Out of the way—the engines are coming!" chorused a hundred excited people rushing for the sidewalks.

The next moment Bob saw a magnificent steamer coming at full speed toward Broadway. The fiery steeds came on like demons of destruction, with glaring eyes and distended nostrils, the terrified crowds flying before them.

Bob saw at once that the horses were excited—so was the driver, who pulled at the lines as though life itself were at stake. They wheeled into Broadway like a tornado, and so suddenly that the driver shot from his seat like a rocket—thrown by the impetus of the rush.

A cry of horror went up from the crowd, and everybody gave way before the unchecked steeds.

"Life is at stake!" cried Bob, springing toward the fiery horses.

The daring telegraph messenger sprang forward, seized the nearest animal's neck, and by a mighty effort, threw himself astride the rushing steed, and caught the lines in his hands, amid the roaring applause of the terrified spectators.

By heroic nerve and self-possession, the young messenger guided the horses to the fire, where the foreman caught them and led them to a hydrant, when the work of throwing water commenced.

"Who are you?" cried the foreman, excitedly, when Bob sprang to the ground, almost exhausted by the strain upon his nerves.

"Bob Percival, telegraph messenger No. 12," he replied.

"You've immortalized yourself," exclaimed the foreman, grasping his hand; "saved the engine and horses—get out of the way—haven't time to talk now," and placing the trumpet to his mouth, he poured forth a series of orders with startling rapidity. Bob, almost too weak to walk, hurried away, and soon got out of the crowd.

"Ah, here you are," cried a man, rushing up to him and taking him by the hand. "You did a brave but rash thing, my young friend, when you mounted that horse; you might have been killed."

"Yes, sir; but I never thought of that," replied Bob, returning the hearty shake of the hand.

"Of course not; I never saw anything like it. A circus rider could not have done it better."

"I'm glad I did it, sir; the horses might have rushed into the crowd and killed somebody."

"Yes, that's so. You're a telegraph messenger, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"I used to be an operator myself."

"Not one now?"

"No; I am working on an invention that is destined

to work a wonderful revolution in the science of telegraphy in this country."

Bob was immediately interested.

"What is it, sir?" he asked, moving up to his side.

"Ah," laughed the man, in a low, triumphant chuckle. "How many people would give a fortune to know that? The president of the Western Union would give half a million to find out even the name of it. But I don't mind showing it to you, though. It is not quite ready yet to be given to the world."

"Indeed, I would like to see it, sir," said Bob, scarcely able to restrain his eagerness to see such a wonderful instrument.

"Come with me, then, and I will show you how it works," said the man, stopping and eying the young messenger closely. "But you must first pledge me your honor that you will not reveal the secret to any one before I am ready to give it to the world."

"Yes—yes!" replied Bob, eagerly. "I will do that, of course."

"Then come with me and I will show it to you."

Bob turned and followed him, going east from Broadway.

In a few moments they were in Baxter Street, going toward the Five Points locality.

"By jingo!" muttered Bob to himself, "he's going right through one of the darkest corners of New York—one of the worst streets in the city! I wonder why he goes through such a dangerous street at night?"

"We'll soon be there," said the inventor. "Come ahead—step lively!"

"You don't live in this street, do you?"

"Yes. You see, I've spent a fortune perfecting my invention, reducing myself almost to starvation—had to take cheap rooms and cheap living until it was finished. In a few months I will be a millionaire, and hailed the world over as the benefactor of my race."

Bob followed, thinking him a wonderful genius, and paid no attention to his surroundings.

"Ah! Here we are," said the man, diving into an underground saloon, whence issued noises and smells not unlike the noises and smells about the Water Street saloon where he delivered the dispatch about two hours previous. He hesitated to follow.

"You don't live in a saloon, do you?" Bob asked.

"No. But I have to go through a saloon to get to my quarters," said the man. "Come on, and don't insult my poverty, because you will some day be glad to know me as a friend."

Bob followed on, going down into one of the worst dives he had ever been in. The inmates and frequenters of the place were the lowest of the low—the vilest of the vile.

The man whispered a few words with the proprietor of the place, who placed a key in his hand.

"Come on," whispered the inventor, leading the way through a door that opened into an inner room.

They passed through two rooms, the air of which seemed close and damp to Bob, who had spent most of his life in the open air. The third door was opened with the key which the saloon keeper had given to the inventor. It was intensely dark, cold and damp in there, as if it had not been

opened for months. As he opened the door, the man seized Bob by the back of the neck and hurled him with great force into the room, closing the door upon him.

How long he remained there till he regained his senses he never knew, as day and night were all the same with him in that prison.

But he exercised a most Job-like patience in waiting for his hour of deliverance to come.

Bob had arisen, when he heard a slight noise behind him. He wheeled around, and by the light of a tallow candle which some one had left burning, he saw a panel of the wall slide back, and a man—a villainous looking specimen—enter.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the man. "Who be yer, anyhow?"

"I'm Bob. Who are you?"

"I'm Jim Cragan. Watcher doin' hyer, eh?"

"Hiding," replied Bob. The idea that to pass himself off as one of like ilk would serve his purpose occurred to him.

"Hidin'?" exclaimed Jim, looking incredulous.

"Yes, from the cops," said Bob, putting on a confidential air that at once disarmed Cragan.

"Give us yer mauler!" exclaimed Jim, coming forward and extending a dirty hand to the messenger. "I'm yer pardner in trouble and in tribulation, 'cause I'm on the hide myself."

Bob laughed, as he placed his hand in the villain's.

"After you, eh? What's you been up to?"

"Crackin' a crib," was the sententious answer.

"Got any swag?"

"Lots."

"Stamps?"

"No—diamonds."

"Spouted 'em?"

"No—got 'em yet."

"How'd you find your way in here?"

"I knowed the back way," said Jim, motioning his hand, "an' crept in through Mag Howard's alley an' down the cellar."

"Good! Didn't know anything about that passage," said Bob.

"Yes—press ther nails an' ther door opens," added Jim.

"Whatcher hidin' for, eh?"

"Priggin' a watch."

"Telegraph boy, eh?"

"Yes—in a horn—that's my blind."

"Good! Git ther ticker?"

"Yes; but dropped it and skipped."

"How'd yer git in hyer?"

"Through the barroom," replied Bob. "Cops been there three times after me. Nary Bob."

Jim laughed and proceeded to make himself at home. He drew out a handful of diamond rings and earrings and showed them to Bob. The rich jewels sparkled and flashed in the light, as if in contempt of their surroundings. Bob surveyed the precious stones with great curiosity.

"Where was the crib?" he asked, taking up a large cluster ring and holding it to the light.

"No. — Bowery," replied Jim, placing the handful back in his pocket. "Jewelry shop."

"Got a pal?"

"Yes, but he's in quod."

"Eh?"

"In quod—Sing Sing."

"Oh!" and Bob relapsed into silence.

"Got anything to eat hyer?"

"No. I'm half starved," said Bob. "I say, pard, give us a stake, and I'll slip out and get a rig and a nice lunch for us both."

Jim Cragan eyed the young pickpocket, as he believed the messenger to be, and said:

"Ain't got no stamps?"

"Let me spout this ring," said Bob, holding up the cluster ring he held in his hand. "I'll get you and me a rig that our own mothers wouldn't know us in. We will then have no fear of the cops, and can walk down Broadway and laugh at 'em."

Cragan opened his eyes in astonishment at the sagacity of the young messenger. He was a burly brute, ignorant and selfish in the extreme; but he recognized the freedom the contemplated disguise would give him.

"Put it thar, pard," he exclaimed, extending his dirty hand to Bob. "Do it, an' I'll divey on ther square."

"All right," said Bob, shaking hands with the burglar. "Tell me how to get out, and I'm off in a jiffy."

"I'll show yer," and pressing against a nail in the wall, the panel slid back, revealing a dark passage beyond. Bob took his hand and let him lead the way, until he reached the ordinary cellar door, which Cragan opened by pushing up against it.

"Go through Mag Howard's," he whispered, as Bob emerged into the moonlight, and then cautiously closed the cellar door again.

"Free—free!" muttered Bob, as he drew a long breath of fresh air, gazing up at the full, round moon.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE.

The sudden and mysterious disappearance of Uriah Gibbs, the wealthy resident of University Place, and of Robert Percival, the telegraph messenger boy, both on the same night, created no little excitement in the great metropolis. Accurate descriptions of the two missing ones were given to the detective, and a search for clues commenced.

It was ascertained that Bob carried a dispatch to Mr. Gibbs on the night of their disappearance. This came from the manager of the telegraph office. The detective went there for particulars, and a copy of the dispatch that Bob delivered to Gibbs was shown him.

"Ah!" said the detective, brightening up. "This is a clew worth having. He is told to settle with Sam Bowler at No. — Water Street, or all is lost. I happen to know Bowler as a suspected murderer, a convicted burglar, and altogether a very bad man. They say Gibbs left the house soon after receiving the dispatch."

"Since you mention Bowler's name," said the manager of the office with sudden interest, "I remember that Robert delivered a message to him at that number, on that very night. He said there was a row down there, and he had a hard time getting away with a whole skin."

"Can you give me the substance of that telegram?" the detective asked.

"Yes, under the same conditions of secrecy."

"Of course."

"Here it is: 'The nephew telegraphs his uncle to see you. Strike him for all he is worth.—Captain.'"

"That's the nut!" exclaimed the detective. "I will proceed to crack it. I don't want any better clew than that!" and turning away, the detective left the office to pay a visit to the den in Water Street.

On reaching the saloon in that detestable dark corner of the city, the detective put on a swagger of a man slightly intoxicated, and stalked in and up to the bar.

The barkeeper eyed him suspiciously, as he did every other new face that came along, and asked:

"What'll yer have, mister?"

"Brandy—Otard, if you have it," replied the detective, leaning leisurely against the counter and glancing around the room.

"Got the best in the city, sir," said the barkeeper, setting a glass and a decanter before him.

Pouring out a moderate drink, the detective drank the brandy without anything of a grimace over the horrible stuff.

He knew the barkeeper was watching him.

"Where's Sam?" asked Nick Burgess, suddenly entering and approaching the bar.

"Dunno—ain't been in to-day," answered the barkeeper.

"Tell him to come up to Pete's to-night, if he comes in," said Nick, taking a drink and turning away.

The detective started as if stung on seeing Burgess.

He had been wanting him for six months for his participation in a burglary in Barclay Street. To apprehend him there would not only be dangerous, but would frustrate his plans in the search for the missing ones.

Paying for his drink in a leisurely manner, he turned and followed Burgess out into the street.

"I'll keep you in sight, my fine fellow," he muttered, as he followed Nick at a little distance, "and find out where Pete's is, and wait there for my man. You may not have a hand in this case, but 'birds of a feather flock together,' they say, and I'll look well to the feathers to-night."

Of course, by following Nick Burgess, the detective soon reached Baxter Street.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "It is Pete Allendoff's where they are to meet. Bad place—worst on the street. Guess I better get myself up before I go down there."

Seeing Burgess enter Allendoff's place, the detective turned back and hastened home to put on a disguise that would enable him to pass unmolested among the habitués of that den of crime. Soon after dark he came strolling along the street, dressed in the garb of a tramp—seedy and careless looking, as if, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up. He entered the place, and found a number of hard cases there. Calling for a glass of brandy and water, he proceeded to light his pipe and make himself at home.

At last his patience was rewarded.

Burgess and Bowler entered the den together, and approached Pete Allendoff, whispered a few words to him and received a couple of keys from him. They turned and entered an inner room and passed out of sight. The detective arose from his stool near by and followed them. But ere he had reached the center of the inner room, Pete Allendoff caught him by the ear and led him back, saying:

"You just keep out of there, or I'll bounce you into the street."

"Ah—yes—I didn't know."

"Well, you know now," said Pete, shaking his head determinedly, "so keep out."

Just then a man entered, and asked Pete in an undertone, yet loud enough for the quick ears of the detective to hear:

"Is Sam here?"

"Yes—no—that is, he'll be here soon, Captain St. Hilaire," stammered Pete, a little confused.

"Where is he?" demanded the captain, sternly.

"In the rear—he'll be out soon. Wait for him."

St. Hilaire was in a rage about something. He stalked to the door and found it locked.

"The key?" he demanded.

"Sam has it."

With a growl and a curse he sat down on a stool beside the detective and patiently waited for the return of his pals.

Ned Grover, the detective, eyed him closely, as if mentally taking his measure.

His authoritative demeanor convinced him that he was a power among the thieving, burglarious gang.

"Who is he?" he asked himself a dozen times. "His is a new face. I'll watch him."

Bowler and Burgess having locked the second door behind them, felt their way across the dark room to the door through which Bob Percival had been hurled the night he was inveigled into the place by the sham inventor.

Fitting the key into the lock, Bowler turned it and pushed open the door.

A tallow dip was burning on the table, giving a dim, shadowy light in the room.

Instead of Bob, the telegraph messenger, they stood face to face with Jim Cragan, the desperate burglar.

"Who are you?" gasped Bowler, in astonishment.

"Who are you?" answered Jim, revolver in hand, determined to die rather than be arrested.

"Where's the boy?" gasped Burgess, nervously.

"Skipped!" was Jim's reply.

"Skipped!" yelled Burgess. "What do you mean? Is he gone?"

"Yes; but he's coming back again. Gone to fetch me some grub and—"

"The whole police force at his heels!" cried Burgess, drawing his revolver and aiming at Cragan.

Crack—crack—crack! went three revolvers in rapidly repeated shots, the first one fired by Cragan putting out the sickly tallow dip. Each then fired at the last flash in the dark, dodging about after each to avoid the bullets.

"The scoundrel!" yelled Burgess. "Kill him, kill him!"

"Ha, ha, ha! blaze away!" came in mocking tones, and the next moment they heard the door slide to in the wall at the further side of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH ANOTHER RICHMOND ENTERS THE FIELD—THE SECRET PASSAGE.

The mocking laugh of Jim Cragan was heard, but not well understood by Bowler and Burgess. They both fired

at each flash in the dark, until every barrel was empty. They then drew their knives, ready to commence a death struggle the moment they met the intruder.

A profound silence reigned in the room when the firing ceased.

"Nick!" called Bowler.

"Here," replied Burgess.

"Hurt?"

"No—are you?"

"Not a scratch."

Burgess struck a match and held it above his head.

Cragan was nowhere to be seen.

The candle was again lighted, and a thorough search of the room made.

"Why, blast my eyes, Nick!" exclaimed Bowler, "we must have fired half our shots at each other!"

"Yes; but where did the scoundrel go? He got out too quick to be a stranger to this place."

"That's what puzzles me. Did you hear him laugh after he had fired once or twice?"

"Yes, and I thought I heard a door shut at the same time."

"It couldn't have been the one we came through."

"I am not sure about that. Let's search through to the front."

Search was made, but nobody could be found.

"Darn strange!" growled Burgess. "There's a secret here somewhere, Sam."

"We must find it out, then," said Bowler. "I'll go and see Pete about it."

Bowler took the key and went to the door that opened into the barroom and unlocked it. Pushing it slightly ajar, he beckoned to Pete, who stood behind the bar waiting on a lot of customers. That busy personage instantly responded by leaving the bar and going to the partition door.

"The boy's gone!" whispered Bowler.

"Yes, and we found another fellow in there who opened fire on us, and—"

"What!" hoarsely ejaculated Pete.

"He put out the light," continued Bowler, "and then put himself out in some way. We can't find him anywhere."

"Perdition!" hissed the proprietor, in a tremor of excitement.

"Is there a secret door or passage to that room?" asked Bowler.

"No."

"There must be, but it makes no difference now. The cops will be down on you before morning. You had better close up."

A few words only of this conversation were heard by Ned Grover, the disguised detective, and Captain St. Hillaire, the head of the gang to which Bowler and Burgess belonged.

St. Hillaire's back was almost against the half-open door, and he heard even more than Grover did.

"The bungling lubbers!" he muttered. "I'll use that boy to send them up," and pulling his hat well down over his eyes, he left the place and hurried off up the street.

"That's the telegraph messenger boy, I'll wager my head on it!" said Grover, rising to his feet and staggering out

of the room. "And he's made his escape in some way I'll go outside and wait for Bowler and Burgess."

Going outside, he went across the street, called a small boy who was hanging around the place, wrote a few lines on a card, and handing it to him, said:

"Take that to the police office under the City Hall and I'll give you a dollar. Here's half of it now."

The overjoyed, half-starved gamin seized the coin and card and ran away as fast as his heels could carry him.

He delivered the card to the officer in charge.

The card read:

Send me down three men in citizen's clothes with the bearer. Ned.

In five minutes three stalwart policemen in citizen's dress were ready to go with the boy. They found Ned Grover waiting for them in front of Pete Allendoff's den.

"What's up, Ned?" asked one of the men, as the detective gave the boy another half dollar for his promptness and fidelity.

"Nick Burgess, the burglar, is in there," he said, pointing toward Allendoff's den, "with another man I want."

They were at once interested, as a considerable private reward was out for the arrest and conviction of Burgess.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes—and Sam Bowler, too."

"They'll fight," whispered one of the men.

"So will we," replied Grover. "We must catch them, by all means. I have reason to believe that telegraph messenger was a prisoner somewhere there."

"They are coming out now," said one of the men, as Pete began to drive out the half-drunken men who nightly congregated around his store.

"He's only driving out the riff-raff," said Grover, "in anticipation of trouble, I think."

"By George, he's closing up!"

"But they are in there still. Wait, and see what they'll do."

Pete Allendoff, fearing a descent of the police on his den of iniquity, drove out the loafers and bummers, and proceeded to close the front door, and put out the lights.

"Now we'll see how that chap got in and out so handy," said Bowler, leading the way back toward the scene of the recent battle with Jim Cragan.

Bullet holes were visible all around on the walls, where the three villains had peppered away promiscuously in the dark.

These received but little notice in the search for the secret door, the presence of which they never before suspected.

All three were familiar with such things, and knew well how to look for them. Pretty soon Pete Allendoff struck a nail on the wall, and a panel slid back, revealing a dark room or passage beyond.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Pete, suddenly leaping aside to avoid any stray shot that might come from within.

"Bring the light," said Bowler to Burgess, raising his foot to step inside the door.

Crack! and a bullet whistled close to his ear.

"Perdition!" hissed Bowler, springing back. "The scoundrel's in there!"

"Come on," came from within, accompanied by a mocking laugh.

"Darnation!" exclaimed Pete Allendoff. "I ought to know that voice. Is that you, Jim?"

"It ain't nobody else," replied Cragan, from within. "What be you tryin' to sink a fellow with lead for?"

"How'd you get in there?" asked Pete, overwhelmed with astonishment.

"I walked in, of course."

"Well, come out, and let's see you!"

"Nixey, Pete—think I'm a fool?"

"Why, what's the matter with you, Jim?"

"Got the hydrophoby bad."

"Hyderphoby!" exclaimed Pete. "Come out—we're all right."

"Who's them other chaps?"

"Sam Bowler and Nick Burgess."

"Why didn't you say so before?" said Jim, promptly coming forward and shaking hands with Pete.

"How the deuce did you get in, Jim?" Pete asked.

"Cellar door back there," he replied, "and I came in through Mag Howard's. Cops shadowing me."

"Ah! I understand."

"Yes," continued Jim. "Found out this hole five years ago—fool 'em every time."

"But the boy?" asked Burgess, anxious to learn the whereabouts of the messenger.

"He said he was hiding from the cops for priggig a watch," replied Jim, "and I gave him a stake to go out and get disguises for both of us, and—"

Burgess gave a prolonged whistle.

"Oh, what a dodge!" exclaimed Bowler.

"He played you for a flat!" said Pete.

"He was a blasted spy," said Burgess, "and you've turned him out to fetch the cops!"

"Show us the cellar door—the front way is dangerous."

Jim Cragan led the way to the cellar door that opened into the little court in the rear of Mag Howard's place, and pushed it open.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT THICKENS—THE TERRIBLE LIME HOLE.

The four men entered and closed the door of Mag Howard's place, where were a dozen or more hard-looking wretches scattered about the room smoking, drinking and gambling.

"Did a boy come through, Mag," Jim asked the woman, taking her aside.

"No—that boy?"

"Quick, boys!" whispered Jim to Pete and his two companions, "the kid didn't pass through; he's outside yet."

Bowler and Burgess instantly sprang to the door, opened it and darted out into the back yard again, to the great surprise of Mag Howard. They began to ransack every nook and corner, but soon gave it up. Nothing of the escaped messenger could be found.

"He must have climbed that plank wall there," said Bowler, pointing to the plank wall that had been built up against two houses to close a narrow alley that led between them to the street.

Burgess looked up at the height of the wall—twenty feet at least—and hissed:

"Yes, he went over that rather than trust himself in Mag's place. Come, let's mizzle."

The precious villains re-entered Mag's place, and went through to the front.

Pete went out first and peered around the locality. He saw four men watching his place from across the street, and knew they were on the watch for the men with him.

Re-entering the dive, he posted his companions.

They filed out, one by one, and turned toward Chat-ham Square, all four meeting there without having been hailed by Ned Grover and the four officers who had come to his assistance.

"That's a nice old skip," said Bowler, leading off toward Water Street. "We'll give 'em a rest to-night, while we take a nap."

"But they'll pull my place," said Pete, undecided what next to do.

"Better let them do that than pull you, eh?"

"I don't believe they want me."

"They will, if that kid gives the thing away," said Burgess, and that settled him.

"I'm off for another hide, boys," said Jim Cragan. "The cops are hunting all over town for me. They are all good friends of mine, and can't bear to leave me alone."

"Good luck to you," said Bowler, glad to be rid of him. Cragan hurried away toward the Bowery, leaving the three to take care of themselves.

They hastened to their headquarters in Water Street.

Just as they were about to slip through the little narrow stairway that led to the balcony in the rear, the barkeeper beckoned to Bowler.

"What is it?" he asked.

Jack merely slipped a daily newspaper into his hand, saying:

"Read it—news."

Bowler put the paper in his pocket and rejoined his companions.

In their room, where they secreted themselves when about the premises, Bowler took out the paper and began looking over the columns. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Burgess. "What's the matter now?"

"Just listen," whispered Bowler, leaning forward and reading from the paper:

"It has been ascertained from the detectives that on the day of his sudden and mysterious disappearance, Mr. Uriah Gibbs drew \$5,000 from the bank in which he kept his money and concealed it in the laps of his coat and vest in the private office of the president of the bank, as though intending to carry it about him for some time or distance. It is now believed that he has gone West, where he owns property, and that he will yet turn up all right in due time, and thus end the mystery of his disappearance. The boy, Percival, has not yet been heard from."

"Great hairpins!" exclaimed Burgess, "what a miss!"

"What a windfall!" gasped Bowler.

"Windfall?"

"Yes. It's safe yet, I guess."

"Safe? What mean you?"

"I mean it's safe on him yet, and we can get it," replied Bowler. Burgess shuddered, and turned pale at the thought.

"Five thousand dollars ain't picked up every day!" muttered Bowler.

"Hang me if I care to pick that up!" said Burgess with a shudder, as if chilled.

"Why, Nick?" asked Pete, not understanding his companion.

"He's in the lime hole!" whispered Burgess.

"We can go down and get it," said Bowler.

"Ugh! Go down, if you like," remarked Burgess, "but leave me out, if you please."

"You wouldn't object to the divvy though, eh?"

Burgess made no reply, but the pallor on his face deepened as he looked up at the smoky rafters overhead.

"You will go down with me, Pete?" asked Bowler.

"Yes—divvy?"

"Of course."

"Keep a lookout above, Nick," said Bowler, rising to his feet and going to a little side closet, from which he took a coil of rope. This he dragged out in the center of the room, and proceeded to tie knots in every three feet. This done, he arose and led the way into a small, dark room, followed by the other two.

The room was entirely bare of furniture and almost square. A well-worn carpet covered the floor, which Bowler proceeded to remove by taking one side and pulling it away.

In the center of the bare floor Allendoff saw the outlines of a trap door. Bowler stooped and raised the trap.

A current of cold air filled the room.

"That's the lime hole," whispered Burgess to Pete.

"And Gibbs—"

"Was killed and thrown down there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Bowler. "One would think you were two twin lambs instead of human wolves, who had murdered time and again. Brace up and lend us a hand. I'm bound to have that five thousand dollars if I have to bring up every skeleton and clean out the hole!"

"Why didn't you get it at first?" growled Pete.

"Didn't know. Thought we got all he had."

Bowler fastened the rope to a ring-bolt, and then let down a lantern by a cord. Thirty feet down the lantern rested on a bed of soft, whitish earth.

"That's lime," whispered Burgess to Pete, as Bowler prepared to descend by the knotted rope which now hung down in the hole.

"Keep steady, now," said Bowler, letting himself down over the verge of the hole. "I'll soon save that pile of stamps."

Down, down he went into the horrible hole, the two pallid faces peering over at him, the flickering, ghostly light at the bottom shedding a sickly glare over everything.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY—THE VILLAINS PUZZLED—NEMESIS.

Burgess and Allendoff lay flat on the floor, peering into the deep well below.

By the dim light of the lantern they could see Bowler feeling about in the lime for the dead body of Uriah Gibbs.

"What makes him so long at it?" whispered Burgess, impatiently, as seconds seemed minutes, and minutes hours.

Deeper and deeper Bowler felt among the pile of loose lime, bringing up now and then the skull or bone of what once formed a part of some human form.

Suddenly he ceased, and gave a half howl, half curse of impotent rage.

"What's the matter?" gasped Burgess from above.

"He isn't there!"

"No!" cried Burgess. "That can't be! We threw him in ourselves, and heard him drop!"

"But I tell you he isn't here!" persisted Bowler.

"But I say he is!" repeated Burgess.

"Come down, then, and help find the body!"

"I'll do it," and laying aside his coat, Burgess seized hold of the rope and swung himself over the dark hole, and slowly and cautiously descended to the side of his companion in crime.

"I tell you, Nick Burgess," said Bowler, whose face was now as white as Burgess', "the body of Uriah Gibbs isn't there. I've looked as deep as the lime could have covered him, but there's nothing here that hasn't been here three months!"

Burgess felt all over the bottom of the old well, and at last gave up in despair.

"Sam!" he hoarsely whispered, "we threw him down, didn't we?"

"Yes."

"Then somebody has taken him out?"

"Strange!"

"Somebody must have known of that money, and got ahead of us!"

"But they would have taken the money and left the body."

"Yes, that's so—let's get out of this hole. I'm done with it hereafter. I don't understand the thing at all."

Bowler seized the rope and commenced climbing up. It was more of a task than descending, and several times he stopped to breathe a spell.

At last he reached the top, and Burgess began to ascend. He was more lithe and active than Bowler, and reached the top with ease. The rope and lantern were then drawn up and put out of the way, the door closed, the carpet returned to its place, and the room locked.

The three villains then faced each other with pallid looks.

"We're undone!" whispered Burgess.

"I don't understand it," said Bowler.

"Strange!" muttered Pete.

"The kid may have told before we caught him that night."

"No, for then the whole world would have known it," said Bowler.

"Was he dead?" asked Pete.

"Dead? I sent this to the hilt in his heart from behind," said Burgess, displaying a formidable dagger.

"He fell to the floor with only a groan, and was dead in a minute," said Bowler.

"Then we threw him into the lime hole. The fall would have killed him."

"Then some one is at work in this house," said Pete, "and for one, I'm going to leave it."

"We'll all go together," said Burgess, rising to accompany him.

"We'll give it the cold shake altogether," said Bowler, as all three left the room to descend to the barroom.

Down in the barroom they each took heavy drinks of brandy to steady their nerves, and then left the place.

"Where shall we go, boys?"

"Chatham Square," replied Bowler.

"Look!" whispered Pete. "We are shadowed—across the street!"

They did look, and saw a dark form keeping well back against the houses, evidently watching their movements.

"Let's scatter," suggested Pete.

"No; keep together, and pretend not to notice him. I'll put a head on him after a while. Leave him alone!"

They resumed their walk, and the dark form kept in sight wherever they went.

Suddenly Bowler wheeled and started toward the man.

The man halted.

"Who are you!" Bowler asked, laying a hand on the man's shoulder and shaking him savagely.

"Nemesis!" hissed the man, striking him a blow between the eyes that stretched him senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

NO HONOR AMONG THIEVES—THE YOUNG ARTIST IN EYES.

As Bowler fell to the ground, Burgess and Pete Allendoff hurried to his assistance. His unknown assailant darted away up toward Chatham Square.

"Hanged if I don't see who he is," muttered Nick, giving chase, leaving Pete to take care of Sam. The man ran the length of the block. Burgess gained on him rapidly. Suddenly he wheeled and confronted Burgess with a revolver in each hand.

"Advance another step and you're a dead man!" he hissed through his clenched teeth.

"Yes!" gasped Burgess, utterly astounded by the sudden move. "You'll let me advance backward, won't you?"

"Better go back to your friend, and let him take care of you," said the man, still holding the pistols on a level with Nick's head. Burgess was stepping backward at a lively gait, and at last he turned and ran back to the corner where Pete was steadying Sam on his feet.

"Did you catch him, Nick?" asked Pete, as Burgess came up.

"No," replied Nick, dryly. "How is Sam?"

"Black eye!" growled Sam. "But I'll smash his chips, or my name ain't Sam Bowler!"

"Who was he?"

"I never give anything away, but you wait for me," said Bowler, significantly.

"I'll go up about my place and see how the land lies," put in Pete.

That was just what Sam and Nick wanted.

They parted.

Bowler and Burgess hurried to the former's room.

"Nick," said Bowler; "did you know the cause?"

"Captain St. Hilaire."

"Just what I thought. He's watching us."

"What for?"

"Jealousy. Because we don't toot through his horn."

"Suspicious of something else, I think," said Burgess.

"Hang his suspicions. I won't have him spying on me."

"Nor I."

Bowler reached forth and grasped his pal's hand.

"Nick!"

"Sam!"

"What do you say?"

"Agreed—I'm with you."

They shook hands.

They understood each other without further parley.

Bowler turned and looked in the glass.

His eyes were colored beautifully from the blow he had received at the hands of the captain of the villainous gang.

"Perdition!" hissed he. "I'm marked for a fortnight!"

"No, no," laughed Burgess. "I know a chap who can paint it up nicely for you."

"Paint it?"

"Yes, and make you look as natural as you were born."

Bowler waited upon the young artist at his rooms up-town, finding half a dozen blackened countenances there ahead of him, the next morning.

He bided his time, and at last took his seat in the chair. The skilful young painter soon put on a coat of flesh-colored paint that concealed the bruise so completely, that Bowler himself could detect neither paint nor bruise on looking in the mirror. Paying the fee, he left in company with Nick, congratulating himself on being rid of the ugly black eye, not a sign of which remained.

On their way back to their quarters they met Pete Allendoff, who was greatly excited.

"What's up, Pete?"

"They've pulled my place," whispered Pete.

"How'd you get away?"

"Skipped out and came through Mag Howard's place."

"Who was with them?"

"That kid, and——"

"Darnation!" gasped Nick, turning pale.

"We must fade away from this," muttered Bowler.

"Yes!—let's go down to Scott Harden's place."

"No, that wouldn't do. They'll pull every place like that in this end of town. We'd better go to some first-class hotel."

"Nixey!" and Burgess shook his head determinedly; "none of your fancy hotels for me, if you please. Scott Harden's place is as safe as any part of the city. He's got even a better place than Pete for hiding."

"Then we'll go there," said Bowler, "and wait for night. We must catch that kid and destroy his evidence."

"Evidence be hanged!" growled Burgess. "I'll destroy him if I ever get my hands on him again. It's your fault that I didn't do it when I had the chance."

"Yes; but it'll be my job if we have the chance again."

"I'm going to look out for my place," said Pete, halting and looking back. "I don't think they can prove anything against me in the case."

"Of course not. But look here, Pete Allendoff, if you squeal, you had better not be born."

"I never squeal," said Pete, solemnly, turning away from his two pals and walking off toward Chatham Square.

Bowler and Burgess kept on their way to Scott Harden's den further up the street.

At that time of day there was little doing at Harden's place. Those who frequented his den generally did so at night—between midnight and dawn—when the dark corners of the great city were ablaze with the red glare of crime.

The two villains entered the little front barroom, which seemed to be only a small stand for the sale of liquors and cigars, instead of the mouth of a cavernous den of infamy.

"Scott," whispered Burgess to the proprietor, who was standing behind the counter smoking a cigar, "we want to retire to private life till to-night."

"Cops, eh?" asked Harden, smiling.

"Yes."

"Come in," and leading the way through another door, he passed through a large hall room, in which was another bar at one end.

Around the room was a row of benches.

Passing through the entire length of the dancing hall, Harden led the way to another room, which seemed to be a hat and cloak room. He touched a secret spring in the wall, and a narrow panel, reaching from floor to ceiling, noiselessly slid back, revealing a room beyond.

"This is bully," said Bowler, as he stepped inside.

"Yes, and safe as the Tombs," added Burgess. "I've been here when no other place would answer. A pal of mine once stayed here two months."

"We'll only stay till night," said Bowler, turning to Harden, as the latter passed out.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE TRAIL—THE BIRDS FLOWN.

Let us now return to messenger No. 12.

On finding himself out in the open air, Bob peered around him with an eye to getting out on the street with as little risk and delay as possible. Voices within Mag Howard's place assured him that it was not the safest route to take. On the other hand, it seemed impossible to get through any other way.

Between the two houses an alleyway once existed, which was now closed up by a plank wall, which had been nailed up against the corners of both houses. The wall reached up high to the second story. Here and there were cracks and a few knotholes, which afforded but a bare hope of a foothold. Yet, as Bob looked up at the forlorn hope, he muttered:

"I'll try, if I fall and break my neck. It won't do to go through there," looking through the door of Mag Howard's place; "so here goes for a little more freedom."

Bob was a good climber.

He got a finger hold here and there, several times slipping, and trying again, climbing higher and higher, until at last he was at the top, where he rested to get breath.

Then he commenced the descent. It was even more difficult, if possible, than the ascent; but hope was stronger now, and letting go, he dropped to the ground and crept out through the alley to the street.

His only thought was his dear mother. To see her and relieve her of anxiety concerning him was his sole desire now.

"But won't I make 'em howl, though?" he muttered, as he turned into Broadway. "The next man that says anything to me about a telegraph invention I'll shoot him on the spot! Oh, won't there be fun when I get 'em in the Tombs!"

In half an hour from the time he left Jim Cragan in Pete Allendoff's den he was at his mother's door.

"Robert, my son—my son!" screamed his mother, as the young messenger entered her apartment.

"Mother—mother!" and child and parent were folded in each other's arms in one long, loving embrace.

"Oh, I feared you were dead, my son!" cried the overjoyed mother. "Why, how pale you look!"

"I have been almost dead, mother," he said, and then proceeded to tell her everything that had occurred to him since she saw him last, except the murder of Uriah Gibbs.

The excited mother pressed him passionately to her heart, and thanked God that he was yet spared to her.

"They will try to harm you yet, will they not, my son?" she asked.

"They may," he replied. "But if I don't get 'em in the Tombs or sent to Sing Sing, it'll be because there's no law in New York City, mother."

"Oh, my son, then they will kill you!"

"No, mother, you've got it down wrong. They'll kill me if I don't have 'em arrested."

"You must never go out of the house at night again!" she cried.

"But I must, if I want to keep my situation," he replied.

"You must give up your situation, then."

"I can't do that, mother," he said, "for then you would starve."

"No, my son. God would not let us starve."

Bob said no more, but went to bed to get the sleep and rest he was so much in need of. He slept until his mother called him up for breakfast.

After breakfast he kissed his mother and said:

"Don't be troubled any more, dear mother. I'll soon be back, unless they put me on duty again at the office."

Bob hurried away to police headquarters, and asked to see the superintendent. Tina, functionary was at breakfast, but came in soon after Bob's arrival.

"Well, what can I do for you this morning, sir?" he asked of the messenger, patronizingly.

"I've a complaint to make, sir," said Bob, "and want to see you in private, if you please."

"Certainly," and the superintendent led the way into a private office. "Now tell me your trouble."

Bob soon told his story—everything, including the murder of Uriah Gibbs and the burglary of Jim Cragan.

"Young man!" exclaimed the astonished superintendent, "you've brought me more news in one batch than ever did any detective on the force. And so you are the messenger who was missing, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I must say, if your story is true, you have had an experience that falls to the lot of but few men."

"I don't want any more of it, sir."

"I guess not. But you don't object to going with my men, and showing them the hiding-place of those rascals, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I'll send for my best detective, and put you under his charge."

In another hour Bob was introduced to Ned Grover, the detective, to whom he related his escape from the Allendoff den at midnight.

"By the eternal!" muttered Grover, "I had three men with me watching that place nearly all night, knowing that Nick Burgess, the burglar, was in there."

"I guess he was," said Bob, "and Jim Cragan, too. Here's the diamond he gave me to spout for him," and handing the diamond to the detective, he gave an accurate description of the manner in which he had managed the burglar.

"A big reward is offered for Jim by the jewelers," said Grover, "and I'll see that you get your share of it when the job is finished. But here are my men—we must be off."

The detective and Bob left the office together, followed a moment later by four daring muscular officers in citizen's suits.

Just before reaching Pete Allendoff's, Grover stopped and waited for his men to come up.

"Two of you go through Mag Howard's place to the yard in the rear," he whispered, "and wait until we come through."

Two of the officers entered Mag Howard's den at the same time that Bob and the others entered Allendoff's place.

Pete was not in, but a young man was tending bar in his place.

"Where's Pete!" Grover asked of the young man behind the bar.

"Out," was the laconic answer.

"Where?"

"Don't know. What d'yer want?"

"I want you," said Grover, displaying his badge and revolver at the same time. "Caper out from behind that counter."

"Oh, say, I ain't done nothing!" whined the youth, trembling so he could hardly walk. "Sit down in that stool, may I?"

"Yes, and don't you dare get up until I tell you."

"Oh, I won't move!"

"Stand there at the door," said Grover to one of the officers, "and don't let any one go out or come in till we return."

Bob pointed to the place where the key to the dark room hung, but the key was not there.

"I'll show you the way, anyhow," he said, turning toward the inner door.

"Do you know where the key is?" Grover asked of the young bartender.

"Pete has it in his pocket."

Bob led the way to the door, which was locked, of course.

He sent one of the men to the nearest locksmith, who came and opened every door for them. Bob showed the room in which he had been confined, and the secret passage which the burglar, Cragan, had revealed to him.

But the birds had flown.

"They're not here now, that's certain," said Grover. "They expected this visit. Let's go through, anyhow."

Bob led them through the little yard in the rear of Mag

Howard's place, where they found two officers waiting for them.

Mag Howard and her assistant were abusive, denouncing Bob as a spy.

"Better keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll run you in," said Grover, threateningly, as he passed through her place. This had the effect of closing her mouth, but did not prevent her from sending word to Jim Cragan that the place had been raided. Jim sent word to Pete, and Pete hurried off to inform Bowler and Nick Burgess.

"Bob, my boy," said Grover, "we missed fire that time, but we'll try it again to-night. We won't give up yet, eh?"

"No, sir; I'll go with you whenever you want me to."

"Come to headquarters to-night, then, and we'll give 'em a chase that'll make 'em sick."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGER—BAGGED AND CAST INTO THE RIVER.

Soon after sunset Bob reported at headquarters to Ned Grover, the detective, ready to accompany him to the dark corners of the city in Water Street.

"It's too early yet, my boy," said Grover. "We'd never catch 'em at such an early hour as this. We'll go to the theater and have a pleasant time. What say you?"

"That pleases me almost to death," said Bob, smiling audibly.

"Come on, then."

And they went.

They failed to notice a man following them from the vicinity of police headquarters, or that he sat directly behind them at the theater. The stranger constantly leaned forward to catch the little snatches of conversation between Bob and the detective.

At the end of the first act the detective arose and went out, as many do at the fashionable theaters, leaving Bob in his seat.

"Excuse me," said the man behind Bob, "but are you not the telegraph messenger, No. 12, who has been missing for several days?"

"Yes—I am the one," said Bob, turning around and partially facing the man.

"I thought so. I saw you at the police station this morning and heard that you were going to have several persons arrested for detaining you."

"Yes, we are going to arrest some of them to-night," said Bob, very innocently.

"Hope you'll succeed," said the man. "Had a pretty rough time of it, didn't you?"

"You can bet I did."

"Of course you know who the parties were?"

"Yes."

"That's good—catch 'em, and send 'em up for a long term."

"They'll get something worse than a term, I'm thinking," said Bob, significantly.

"How? They don't hang a man for depriving another of his liberty."

"No! but they do for murder, though."

"Did they attempt to murder you?"

"No; but they murdered somebody else."

"Who was it?" said the man, betraying intense interest in his story.

Suddenly the thought occurred to Bob that he was talking too freely with the stranger, or that the man was a little too anxious to learn what he knew of the case.

He stopped and eyed the man with a keen, suspicious gaze, and turned away just as the curtain rose on the second act. A few minutes later Ned Grover came back, and resumed his seat alongside of the young messenger.

Together they sat and watched the play throughout. Just before the last act Bob felt a small piece of paper fall into his lap, as if it had fallen from the balcony overhead. He carelessly picked it up, and looked at it.

On it was written:

"You will find Bowler and Burgess concealed in Scott Harden's den on Water Street."

He wheeled and looked around him. The stranger with whom he had conversed was gone.

"Great hoecakes!" exclaimed Bob, completely thunder-struck.

"What's the matter?" asked Grover.

"Look at that!"

The detective seized the paper and read it.

"Who gave you this?" he asked.

"I don't know. It fell in my lap now."

The detective cast a keen glance around and above, but could see no one on whom to fasten suspicion.

"When you went out after the first act," said Bob, "a man who was sitting behind us asked me if I wasn't the missing messenger, and I told him yes."

"The dickens!" and Grover wheeled around and asked the man who sat next to him:

"Do you know that gentleman who sat there, sir?"

"I do not, sir," replied the gentleman.

"What else did he say?" turning to Bob.

"He said he hoped we'd catch 'em and send 'em up for a long term; and I said we were going to nab 'em to-night."

"You did!"

"Did I do wrong, sir?"

"Of course—you gave the whole thing away."

"Gave it away? How?"

"That fellow was a pal of theirs, and he's gone to tell 'em that we are coming after them. Why the deuce didn't you keep your mouth shut?"

"I never thought I was doing any harm, sir," said Bob, considerably crestfallen.

"Of course not—you didn't know any better—come, let's go."

They arose with the audience as the curtain fell, and passed out on the street.

"That is an attempt to throw us off the track, Bob," said the detective; "but we'll prove to 'em that we're not so fresh as all that. We'll go down to Jack's den the first place, and lay for them there."

They soon reached the station, where four officers were waiting for them.

From there to Water Street was but half an hour's walk.

It was midnight when they arrived at Jack's den, where Bob met his first mishap.

The place was full of such customers as might be ex-

pected of Water Street, who stared at the five men and boy as they entered.

Many and black were the looks cast upon Bob.

"The spy!" hissed some one in the crowd. "Down with him—kill him!" and the next instant Bob saved his life by dodging under a table, as a heavy black bottle was hurled at his head.

"Keep quiet, or I'll arrest the last one of you!" said Ned Grover, drawing his revolver and facing the infuriated bummers.

"Down with the cops!" said a voice, and the next instant came a volley of chairs, bottles, bullets and anything else that came handy.

Grover shot a burly ruffian down, which so infuriated the crowd that they rushed in for a hand-to-hand fight.

One of the officers was knocked out of time, and a scene of indescribable confusion ensued.

Bob sprang up as the table was turned over, and was rushing to the side of the detective when a bag was thrown over his head and drawn tightly about him, and he was lifted in a pair of strong arms and borne away.

"Help! help! help—save me! Murder!" he yelled at the top of his voice, but was scarcely heard in the din of the rabble.

"Help! help!" he screamed again, as he felt himself borne away from the house.

"Keep still, or I'll smash yer on the ground!" said a voice beside him.

Bob concluded to keep quiet and await for developments, seeing he was helpless to resist. The man ran a short distance and then suddenly halted, laid the bag on the ground, took it by one end, swung it back and forth a few times, and then let go. Bob felt himself thrown, and the next moment a splash, a shock and the cold waters of the East River closed over him.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH.

The horror of the situation flashed through the messenger's mind like an electric shock.

He struggled with all his might to free himself from the bag. Half his body was out, but it still held him in its deadly embrace like the tentacles of an octopus, and he felt himself going down—down into the cold depths of the unrolling river.

Suddenly he felt something pulling at the bag. It slipped from over him, and half strangled, he beat wildly with hands and feet until he came to the surface.

The bag had been carried by the swift current against the pier below, where it had been caught on a nail or spike in such a manner that it permitted him to slip out of it by the action of the current.

"Uh—ah—ugh!" he gasped, on coming to the surface.

"Help! Help!"

The tide was carrying him toward the second pier below. He was a good swimmer, but he was almost drowned and frozen. It required all his strength to save himself from being carried beyond a pier, but he caught one of the logs and held on for dear life.

"Help! help!" he cried, and his voice echoed far out over the rushing waters as they rolled seaward.

"Help! help!" he shouted again, feeling that he had not strength enough left to climb to the top of the pier.

"Stop that music!" hissed a voice near him, "or yer'll have the cops down on us!"

"Help me out, or I'll drown—I can't hold out much longer," said Bob.

"Yank him through and stop his squawkin'," said one, the voices seeming to come from under the pier.

"Stick yer blade inter him, and let 'im slide," said another.

"What's the matter wid yer?" asked the first voice, close by the half-drowned messenger.

"I'm freezing and drowning," said Bob, shivering as if he had the ague. "Can't you help me out of this?"

"Ya-as, guess I kin," and Bob felt a grasp on his shoulder that seemed to be that of a giant, and the next moment he was drawn through the crack between the logs, and deposited in a boat in which four men were sitting.

"A kid!" said one of the men. "What ther——"

"Hist!"

A silence fell upon them—a silence broken only by the water rushing by the pier.

Voices overhead were heard.

"I heard somebody calling for help," said one.

"Yes, and I guess as how it came from out in the river," said another, and a flash of light as of a lantern danced out on the water about the pier.

"Utter a word and you are a dead man!" hissed a voice in Bob's ear, and he felt a strong hand at his throat.

"Not a word," whispered Bob.

The man relaxed his hold on his throat, and Bob sat like a statue in the bottom of the boat.

Soon they heard people leaving the pier, and all was still again.

"Did yer fall in?" asked one, who seemed to be the leader of the party.

"No," said Bob, "I was pitched in."

"You were?"

"Yes, and in a bag."

A low whistle, expressive of astonishment, escaped the leader.

"I'm a telegraph messenger."

"What'd yer get bounced for, eh?"

"Got into a muss with some of the boys of Water Street. They put up this job on me as a joke."

"Darn good joke!"

"Not much of a joke," said Bob, shivering. "I'd like to get on land and go home."

A whispered conversation was then carried on by the men, not a word of which he could either hear or understand. Finally the leader turned to him with:

"Say, you kid, were you older, we'd douse you for good, but we'll take you with us to-night to see what's in yer. If yer squeal, we'll drop yer overboard."

"You can trust me," replied Bob, determined to accommodate himself to circumstances, in order to facilitate his escape.

To the messenger's astonishment, one of the men raised an oar and pushed against the very log on which he had caught when drifting with the tide.

The log parted and one piece drifted around, leaving an opening large enough for the boat to go through. Two or

three strokes of the oars sent it through, each dodging the log as he passed under. The log was then swung back into position.

"Pull away, boys," said the leader, in a low tone of voice.

They rowed out into the river and headed downstream.

Not a word was spoken until the hull of a schooner loomed up in the darkness. They seemed to be drifting directly under her.

One of the men caught a rope that hung over the side of the schooner, and the boat rounded to alongside of her.

Two of the men nimbly climbed aboard, leaving two in the boat. A few moments later a low signal was heard and the leader went aboard.

"Hello! Help! Mur——" burst upon the listening ears of the shivering messenger.

The cry was cut short, and the sound of a short, desperate struggle was heard. Several groans were heard.

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Bob; "somebody is——"

A hand on his throat cut him short, and a dagger flashed before his eyes.

"Do you want to be food for the fishes, you idiot!" hissed the man. "Just utter another word, and down you go to the little tomcods!"

"Splash!" went something in the water near the bow of the vessel, and a human body floated up against the boat. Bob saw the upturned face of a murdered man and groaned.

He had fallen into the hands of a gang of river thieves and had again been made the unwilling witness of a foul murder.

Package after package was lowered over the side of the vessel and received into the boat.

"Bear a hand hyer, kid," whispered the river pirate, as a heavy package was lowered, and Bob promptly responded.

The boat was soon as full as they dared fill it, and then they rowed off, returning to the pier under which Bob first met them. They secreted the goods in a secure place far back under the dock, and once more returned to the boat to pay another visit to the schooner.

"Halt, there!" called a voice from the dock.

"Hist!" said the leader, in a low voice; "pull away, boys."

Crack! went a revolver on the pier, and a bullet whistled uncomfortably close to Bob's ear.

"Halt, or I'll fire!" cried the stern voice on the pier again.

"Pull steady, boys," whispered the leader.

Crack! came another shot, but the bullet went wide of the mark. The boat was now far out into the stream and out of sight.

The leader steered straight for the schooner and rounded to under the shadow of her dark hull. Nimbly they climbed aboard and commenced lowering goods over the side.

"Hist!"

The sound of oars was heard coming from the New York side.

"Send the kid aboard," whispered the leader.

"Up with ye," said the man in the boat, lifting up the half-frozen messenger to give him a start up the rope.

"Steady now, or yer'll drop."

"Not a word, do yer hear?"

"Yes," replied Bob, pulling himself up hand over hand. The sound of oars came nearer and more distinct as Bob reached the deck.

"Up with you, Hank," and the man in the boat followed with squirrel-like agility.

"River police!" whispered one of the gang.

"Yes. Hush!"

"Ahoj, there!" came from a boat in the river but a short distance away.

"Boat, ahoj!" answered the leader of the thieves.

"Seen a boat passing?"

"Yes, going below!" replied the pirate; "and wouldn't answer my hail!"

The police boat pulled hard downstream, and was soon out of sight.

"Well done," said one of the men, as the sound of oars died away.

"Over with you, Hank!" said the leader, and one of the thieves descended to the boat again, followed by Bob.

Goods in packages were lowered into the boat, and again they were loaded almost to the water's edge.

"To the dock!" and the men tumbled down the side of the vessel into the boat, and pulled noiselessly away.

The thieves stowed their stolen goods up under the dock, where only the highest spring tides could reach them.

They shoved the boat under the pier, and went ashore, taking the half-dead messenger with them.

"What are you going to do with me?" Bob asked, growing desperate with hunger and cold. "I ain't no use to you.

Why don't you kill me, or let me go?"

"Blast my eyes!" exclaimed the leader, "I've a mind to take you at your word."

He led the way to a low den fronting the river. Giving signal raps on the door, it was soon opened by as ugly and villainous a looking man as the darkest corners of New York could boast of, and whom the river pirates addressed as Mike.

At a signal from the leader of the gang, Mike led the way into a back room, where a flight of stairs led to the underground apartments. Taking a lamp, he led the way down, followed by the four in silence.

"Here— you wait till we come back, kid," said the leader.

Instantly the horrors of Pete Allendoff's Baxter Street den flashed over our hero, and with a cry he sprang toward the open door.

"Ha, ha, ha! not so fast, my young bantam," said Mike, catching him by the shoulder and thrusting him back.

"Yes; get back there!" hoarsely ordered one of the river thieves.

"Kill me—kill me!" cried Bob, frantically, "but don't leave me here."

"You'll die soon enough," growled the thief, as he hurled him back toward the further end of the room and closed the door with a bang.

His eyes fell upon something slightly projecting from a crevice in the wall. He seized and drew it forth. It was a rusty burglar's jimmy. "A jimmy!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

By some strange impulse he was tempted to insert the end of the jimmy into the crevice in the wall, using it as a lever. To his astonishment a large stone was displaced, falling to the floor at his feet.

"Good—good!" he cried, in great excitement. "I can make my escape yet! Let's see if this hole leads anywhere." Seizing the lamp, he held it to the hole in the wall.

"The sewer!" he exclaimed, in great surprise.

Yes, he had struck one of the great sewers that emptied into the East River.

"I'll go into that sewer and follow it to the end," he muttered. "There must be some way of getting out of it, and I'll find it!"

So saying, he took the lamp in one hand and the hammer and burglar's jimmy in the other, and entered the sewer.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SEWER.

Perilous, indeed, was the journey he now undertook. Swarms of wharf rats fled before his approach, and gathered in numbers as he advanced.

"What if they should turn on me?" Bob could not help asking, as the squirming, writhing, squeaking mass scampers only a little in advance of him. A dark, slimy, sluggish stream was running through the sewer, but Bob heeded it not. He pushed forward through the great sewer, and in a few minutes noticed that the swarm of rats were in a terrible commotion, some leaping toward him as if to attack him. Raising his lamp above his head, he could see the waters of the East River.

"The tide from the river," he exclaimed. "They can go no further and will fight! Good heavens! there's enough of them to kill a dozen men. I can't go any further—ugh!" and the bare thought of again encountering the loathsome creatures made him shudder with horror.

"Ha! there he goes with the light!" cried a voice in the sewer behind him. "Kill him—don't let him get away, boys. Get out of my way."

Crack!

Bob felt a bullet whistle by his head and knew that he was pursued.

Crack! and the lamp in his hand was shattered.

He was instantly enveloped in impenetrable darkness.

"To stay here or return is certain death," muttered the young messenger. "There may be a chance ahead. I'll swim for it!" and with a prayer on his lips, he sprang forward through the water and army of rats. He heard them scatter out of his way, and felt several spring upon him, but he minded them not, plunging forward deeper and deeper into the water until he was waist deep.

"A light—a light!" he cried, swimming toward the mouth of the sewer, through which he could see the light of day. In a few minutes he was out of the sewer, swimming for dear life alongside one of the docks.

"Help! help!" he feebly cried, almost exhausted. "Save me—I cannot hold—out—much longer!"

"Man overboard!" cried a sailor, looking over the side of a ship that was anchored near by.

"Cast a rope!" ordered an officer.

A rope was thrown.

Bob seized it as a drowning man is said to grasp at a straw.

But he was too weak to do more than cling to it. He could not climb aboard.

A boat hastened to his assistance. He was taken into it and the next moment he fainted, gasping:

"Saved—saved!"

He was carried on the pier, and thence to the Chambers Street Hospital, utterly unconscious. His terrible sufferings, and the great strain upon his mental powers was too much for one of his tender years.

Brain fever set in, and the wild ravings of the young messenger told of the scenes through which he had passed. The dark corners of New York never made such vivid impressions on the minds of people as did the incoherent ravings of the young telegraph messenger.

Ned Grover, the indomitable detective, hastened to the hospital and identified him as the missing Bob Percival, the young telegraph messenger.

"Do you know where he resides?" the physician asked of the detective.

"Yes, I believe I remember the street and number."

"Be kind enough to inform his people of his presence here," said the doctor. "He calls for his mother so much that I can but believe her presence would be beneficial to him."

Ned Grover left the hospital, and in two hours returned in a carriage with Mrs. Percival, Bob's widowed mother.

"My son! Oh, my son!" cried the terrified mother, throwing herself on the bed by his side and giving way to an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

His flushed, fevered face rendered her almost frantic with grief, and his scarred and swollen hands, where the rats had bitten, still further alarmed her.

But the calm assurance of the surgeons in charge calmed her fears to such a degree that she could talk rationally.

Grover explained to her that the thieves had captured him again and imprisoned him somewhere, whence he had made his escape.

"Madam," said he, "his life will never be safe until they are caught and made to pay the penalty of their crimes."

"But what has he done that they should seek his life?" she asked.

"He was a witness to a crime they committed. They found it out and seek to destroy his evidence by destroying him."

Mrs. Percival shuddered and kissed the fevered brow of her boy.

"Oh!" she murmured. "What would I do without my brave boy? He is all I have in the world, and even now he supports me when I am not able to work."

"His misfortunes will pay in the end, madam," said the detective. "Through his agency, I have been able to arrest the notorious Jim Cragan, burglar, and capture a lot of diamonds, the reward for which is five hundred dollars. Here is half of the money, which justly belongs to him. Take it, and trust him with me, and I'll see that he does not again suffer at the hands of his enemies."

Mrs. Percival took the money in bewildered surprise—more money than she had ever before owned in her life. "You will let me stay here and nurse him?"

"Of course."

And she did. The sound of her voice had a soothing effect on the young messenger, and on the third day the

fever broke. Bob recovered consciousness, knew every sound around him, but was too weak to talk.

He gradually grew stronger, and in a few days told the story of his adventures and sufferings. They seemed almost incredible.

"I saw them getting off with you," said Grover, "and did my best to get to you, but they crowded me too hard, and I had to fight for my life. We succeeded in getting off, however, and half an hour afterward we captured Jim Cragan with the pawn tickets for the diamonds in his pockets. It was no trouble to find the goods. We recovered everything, and got the reward of five hundred dollars, half of which I have given to your mother as your share. When you get up again, you will make a bigger haul than that."

"How?" he asked, feebly.

"By aiding in the capture of the others."

"But I ain't a detective, and I've got enough to last me," he said, smiling.

"They will never let you live to see the hangman's noose around their necks, Bob," said the detective. "Either you or they must go."

"Then they must go."

"That's spoken like a hero. We will take care that they don't get away with you again. You shall go armed, and we will have men enough to clean out the darkest corner in New York."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DISGUISE.

Bob's convalescence was rapid after the fever left him.

One afternoon, when he was fully recovered, Ned Grover came to the hospital with a valise in his hand, and asked for Bob.

The messenger was summoned.

"Come with me, Bob," he said, leading the way to the front door of the office. Bob followed, and, out on the street, asked:

"What's up now, sir?"

"Fun ahead," replied the detective, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Not such as I have been having, I hope?"

"Oh, no! Got the dead wood on 'em this time, my boy."

"Had it on me the last time."

"All the more fun for you this time," replied the detective.

Bob followed him to his office on Broadway, where, when they entered, the detective closed and locked the door, and said, turning to him:

"There's to be a big racket down at Scott Harden's place on Water Street to-night, Bob, and all the worst thieves in the city will be there."

"Whew!" said Bob. "If half of 'em are there, they'll be strong enough to whip all the police in the city."

"I guess not," laughed Ned. "I've got the dead wood on 'em this time. I want you to dress up as a girl and go there with a dozen of our men."

"Only a dozen?"

"That's enough for our purpose," said Ned. "We can bag all the birds we want with that number."

"If they get me in their power again, my life wouldn't be worth praying for, Mr. Grover."

"I'll stake my life and stand by you, Bob," said the detective, opening the valise, and displaying everything to make a female out of him to all outward appearances. "Besides, here are two pistols and a knife with which you can defend yourself. You know they will never let you alone as long as you are in possession of the secret of the murder of Uriah Gibbs. So you may as well try to turn the tables and insure your safety, and send them where they can do no harm."

"All right—dress me up. I may as well face the music again, as live in danger of being knocked on the head every time I go out of doors."

"That's sensible," and the detective at once set to work transforming the telegraph messenger into a young, saucy female.

The dress fitted him nicely, and when the toilet was finished it would have taken a very shrewd observer to discover the deception.

"Upon my honor, Bob!" exclaimed the detective, "you could promenade Broadway from the Bowery to the Park without being detected. Hanged if you won't be about the best-looking girl there to-night!"

"But where will I carry my pistols?" Bob asked,

"Put one in your bosom, and the other in your pocket. You will have no occasion to use them, however."

Bob secreted the weapons as best he could, and then paced across the room two or three times, practicing before the mirror the many artful motions of the females. His natural lively temperament and love of fun soon caused him to enter more heartily into the arrangements.

When they left the detective's office the streets were in full blaze. They entered a carriage and drove to the Grand Opera House, on Eighth Avenue, to see a play not very dissimilar to the one they were to perform at a later hour of the night.

"Now for the good supper, Bob," said Ned, as they drove away from the theater.

"I am willing to charge any restaurant in the city," said Bob, laughingly.

"Let's charge Delmonico then?"

And they did.

From Delmonico's they strolled around to the police headquarters in Mulberry Street, where they found fifteen men in every style of citizen's dress awaiting them. They were brave, stalwart fellows, armed to the teeth; some dressed as sailors, others as mechanics and laborers, while others appeared as bums and rounders.

"Hanged if he ain't a good-lookin' gal," said one of the officers, giving Bob a close, scrutinizing glance, "and I ain't sure you're not putting up a job on us, Ned."

"It's a high old job we're putting up on somebody," said Ned in great glee, for he felt sure of success this time. "It's now one o'clock. We'll straggle out two at a time, keeping each other in sight. Bob and I will go ahead, and mind that you keep us in sight. Come on, Bob, let's be off," and gallantly offering his arm to Bob, he led the way to the street.

When they reached the vicinity of Scott Harden's place, Ned whispered:

"Go ahead, Bob. They'll be glad to have as good looking a girl as you there any time. I'll come in about a minute later."

"But what if they won't let you in?" Bob asked, a little nervously.

"Come out again in ten minutes. But I never fail to get in such places when I have the stamps. Go ahead."

Bob advanced and entered the little front room, betraying just the least timidity.

"Come in, my dear," said a fat, pock-marked, red-faced man who was in charge. "Go right in; the boys is havin' a bully time."

Bob entered the inner door, and was astounded at what he saw. A long, low-ceilinged room was full of men in various stages of intoxication, whirling around the room in the giddy mazes of the waltz. At one end was the bar, dispensing the vilest of liquors, while a band at the other end discoursed the most wretched music ever heard outside of a sawmill.

"Ah, my dear," said a burly, red-faced man standing near the door, as he entered, "I've been looking for you. Come, let's dance," and seizing him by the arm, he dragged Bob out on the floor, without waiting to see whether or not it was agreeable.

Fortunately for Bob he was a good dancer and very fond of this exercise. He was as graceful at dancing as the best dancer in the room.

"Come, let's have a drink," said his partner, as they left the floor and started toward the bar.

"Thank you. I never drink," said Bob, pulling back.

"You don't!"

"No, sir; I never drink any liquors of any kind."

"What in thunder did you come here for, then?"

"To dance."

"Dancing is mighty dry work," he said. "Come and see me drink, then."

"No; I will wait for you. If I go to the bar they will put me out if I don't drink."

"Well, wait for me, then," said the man, going toward the bar alone. Bob turned and glanced eagerly around the room. He saw Ned and the entire body of officers there. That gave him great relief. He was about to go to Ned, when a rough pinched his arm.

"Hello, sis!"

Whack! went Bob's open hand in his face.

"Mind how you pinch, sir!" he said, tears almost starting in his eyes, so great was the pain.

"Blazes!" growled the rough, rubbing his face. "I'll have a kiss for that," and forthwith he seized him around the waist and lifted him clear off the floor.

Whack! came another blow, and the rough staggered back, almost falling to the floor.

"Who was that?" he hissed, glaring viciously around.

"Me—I'm yer oyster!" said the man with whom Bob had danced. "That's my gal."

But for the prompt interference of the proprietor of the place there would have been a first-class riot. Bob refused to dance with the man again.

He went to the bar and began drinking immoderately, swearing death to any man who dared dance with his "gal."

"I see Nick Burgess," Bob whispered to Ned Grover.

"Yes, I saw him when I first came in. Can you entice him out on the street, where we can pick him up quietly?"

"I'll try."

Bob strolled over to where Burgess was standing talking to another "bird of a feather," and gave him a wink. She was young and apparently fresh to such scenes, so thought Burgess, and in a moment he was at Bob's side.

"Never seen you here before," he remarked to Bob.

"No; this is the first time I was ever in here. I think it is perfectly horrid, don't you?"

"Pretty hard place," said Nick, smiling. "But then, one can have some fun here."

"Come with me and I'll take you to a better place than this, where we can find more fun than you can here."

"Will you come back again?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"Go ahead, then," and the two left the house together.

On the corner of the next block two policemen pounced upon them, and made Nick Burgess a prisoner, clapping the nippers on him before he could fairly understand the situation.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the officer. "That was well played, my lad. Bring on another one."

"Who are you?" cried Burgess, turning fiercely on Bob.

"Bob Percival, the telegraph messenger," replied Bob, promptly.

A bitter oath escaped Burgess, and his actions betrayed his consternation.

"Come; off with him," said the officer in command, and the notorious burglar and supposed murderer was marched off to the police station a helpless prisoner.

Bob returned to the house, and danced with two of the river thieves who committed the murder on the schooner in the East River the night he fell into their hands.

These he successfully led into the trap set for them, and they, too, were marched off to the police station.

It was nearly two hours before Sam Bowler made his appearance. Bob made advances to him, but was repulsed. He was looking for Nick Burgess.

"He went out with that gal an hour ago," said some one, pointing to Bob.

"Do you know where Nick Burgess is?" Sam finally asked of Bob.

"Yes," replied Bob. "Are you Sam Bowler?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's up at my place, and sent me over to tell you to come over there as soon as you came in."

"What in thunder is up now, I wonder?"

"I don't know, sir; but he's in terrible trouble about something. Will you come with me?"

"Of course."

Bob took his arm and the two left together.

On the corner above two men approached them. A suspicion flashed through Bowler's head that he had been snared. He sprang into the middle of the street, drew his revolver and stood at bay as a dozen disguised policemen surrounded him.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTURED.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the detective, leveling a pistol at the desperado's head. "Gee'n it at last, Sam Bowler!"

A dozen revolvers were cocked and aimed at him from all sides.

"Do you surrender?" Ned asked.

"No!" was the fierce reply, and then turning to Bob, asked: "Did you put up this job on me, girl?"

"Guess I helped to do it," coolly replied Bob. "You see, it don't pay to catch telegraph messengers and lock 'em up in dark dens, like Pete Allendoff's—"

Bang! went Bowler's revolver, and Bob staggered back into the arms of a policeman. The next instant, the desperado was hurled to the ground, disarmed and ironed.

"Are you hurt, Bob?" Ned asked, greatly concerned for the young messenger.

"No; only the powder burnt my face and blinded me for a moment. Good heavens, I thought I was killed!"

Three officers were detailed to carry Bowler to the station house, while Ned and Bob concluded to go back to the dancing place and see who else they could find that were needed by the police.

The mad revelry still went on, and the vile liquor sold there began to do its work. Men reeled and staggered about the room disgustingly drunk. Thieves who had been dodging and skulking for months now threw off all disguise and mingled in the wild orgie with no fear of the minions of the law before them.

"That tall fellow with the red mustache," whispered Ned to Bob, "is the notorious Dick Seddons, who killed Tom Higgins three years ago. He was acquitted by a technicality, but was one of the gang that burglarized a bank off Third Avenue last summer. Bring him out if you can."

Bob made his way to the red-mustached individual and engaged him in a dance. Of course, such an unsophisticated female had no difficulty in enticing him away.

He wrapped a shawl around his neck, pulled his hat down over his ears, and started out with him.

"Hello, Dick, old pard, how are ye?" exclaimed Ned, laying a heavy hand on the burglar's shoulder, while he held a revolver at his head with the other.

Dick leaped like a steel spring, and glared at the detective.

"Don't know me, eh?"

"Ned Grover!" gasped Dick, bounding away like a deer.

But three disguised policemen were close at his heels, one of whom dealt him a blow that sent him to the earth, stunned and bleeding. He was made a prisoner and marched off to the station house.

By this time it began to be reported that a platoon of policemen in citizen's dress was in and about the house, picking up the men they wanted. The report caused a regular stampede among the crowd of revelers, and in a few moments Scott Harden was standing in his deserted hall, venting his wrath.

The result of the night's work was the capture of five desperadoes, two of whom, Sam Bowler and Nick Burgess, were charged with having murdered Uriah Gibbs, and with imprisoning and otherwise illusing Robert Percival, the telegraph messenger, besides other crimes for which the police had been on the lookout for them.

Of course, Bob's agency in the arrest was talked of by everybody. The papers heralded his exploits as worthy of a hero. In twenty-four hours everybody in New York had heard of Messenger No. 12, Bob Percival, and hundreds came to see him.

But while he had turned the tables on his enemies, and

had the satisfaction of seeing them behind prison bars, they yet had the power to strike from an unexpected quarter.

The next day after his arrest, Sam Bowler sent for a friend, who at once came to see him.

They held a private conference together, after which the man left.

He was one of his pals, but quite unknown to the police.

Let us follow him, and see upon what errand he goes.

He went to three or four fashionable hotels on Broadway, apparently in search of some one. At last he found his man.

The reader has seen him before.

He was Captain St. Hillaire, the chief of the gang, whom Bowler 'desired to depose, and assume his position among his pals.

"Captain," said the man, tapping him gently on the shoulder, as he stood in front of a Broadway hotel, "come with me a few moments, if you please."

"Certainly," said the bland captain, excusing himself from the gentleman with whom he was talking. "What's the matter now, Dan?"

"Sam's in the Tombs," said Dan, in a low tone of voice.

"So I learned from the papers this morning," said St. Hillaire, indifferently.

"I've just come from him."

"Indeed! How does he take to it?"

"He doesn't tumble worth a cent," said Dan; "but he wants you to go down there right away."

"He does?"

"Yes; and you must go, you know, for we've all got to get together to fix up a plan to get him out. He's one of the best men in the gang."

"So he is. I'll go down within an hour," said St. Hillaire, turning away from Dan and retracing his footsteps. Dan went back downtown, leaving St. Hillaire to follow at his leisure.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sammy, my boy!" chuckled St. Hillaire to himself. "You held a pistol to my head once and wanted to be captain of the gang. Now that you're in quod, you call on me to get you out. It won't do, sonny. You must go up; it can't be helped. You dare not squeal on the gang, for that would make it go harder still with you. Ha, ha, ha! Things suit me lovely! I'll go down and see him, tell him I'm sorry and promise to do my best, and then make sure that telegraph messenger puts in his say against him. I am going to look out for number one always."

The elegant young prince of thieves then betook himself to the Tombs, asked for and received permission to visit Bowler in his cell. A few minutes later he was shown in and stood face to face with his rival.

CHAPTER XVI.

FACE TO FACE.

The two rivals stood face to face, glaring at each other in fierce hate.

"Captain," said Bowler, after a pause, "I'm jugged."

"So I see," coolly replied St. Hillaire, "and I'm not in the least surprised."

"You ain't!"

"No: I expected it."

"The dance you did!"

"Yes: it's a natural consequence of bungling."

"You have taunted me with being a bungler in the profession. That's all very well; but I want to say to you, that there must be no bungling in this case; I won't have it. If you make a bungle of it, and I have to go up, I'll take you with me."

Captain St. Hillaire started as if stung. Bowler had hit him hard, and he knew it.

"What is it you want me to do?"

"Get me out of this place."

"But if I fail?"

"Then kill that kid—that telegraph messenger—for his testimony will hang me."

"I will do my best, Sam," said St. Hillaire, turning to leave.

"We are mortal enemies from this hour!" muttered Bowler, pacing to and fro in his narrow quarters. "But I don't think he will dare to go back on me, no matter how much he would like to. He can't afford it. He knows I would be as good as my word, and give him away entirely. But for fear of that, he would hang me in a minute, if he could. If I get out, we will have to settle it between ourselves, and I'm willing to meet him any way he likes."

Captain St. Hillaire left the Tombs in a furious rage.

"The scoundrel!" he hissed, as he wended his way down the massive stone steps. "He has me in his power now more than ever, and if he should go under, his hatred of me would be such that he would drag me down with him. Sam Bowler, there will be a terrible reckoning when we meet outside of prison walls again! I will try to get you out, more for the satisfaction of making you feel my vengeance than to save myself from your squealing and— But, hello! I forgot to see Nick Burgess! He would never squeal. He's as game as any in the world. I believe, friend though he is to Bowler, that he would stand by me against him on certain conditions. I'll see him to-morrow."

The captain strolled up Broadway, and there took an uptown omnibus.

He was greatly troubled what to do with Bob, the indomitable telegraph messenger.

"I don't want to kidnap him!" he muttered, "and thus set the populace on his trail. I will see some of the boys to-night, and see what they will do about it."

That night the captain of the gang visited Scott Harden's place on Water Street and found one of his men there.

Signals were exchanged between them, and the next moment they were in close confab together.

"Oh, that's all right, cap'en," said the man. "Dan an' me will attend to him—here comes Dan now."

Dan entered at that moment, and the three conferred together.

"You look out for Sam, captain," said Dan. "I am after that kid myself. If he enches me like he did the others, I'll go down myself in the gutter."

"You watch that boy, Dan," said St. Hillaire. "One of the best detectives is at his back, and the first thing you know you'll have the bracelets on."

"If I do, I'm willing to hang for a fool," said Dan. "Catch a weasel asleep, will you?"

"That boy is a weasel you will do well to watch. I understand he's back on duty again at the telegraph office."

"Yes; and telling the boys how he played it on Sam and Nick. I heered him to-day. Skin me for an eel, if I don't make him eat his ears yet for his impudence."

"Well, meet me here to-morrow night, and we'll compare notes, and arrange for some plan to relieve Sam."

"All right, captain," said the two men, who remained at Harden's after St. Hillaire left them.

"I'll be on the lay for the kid to-morrow, and to-morrow night," said Dan; "and if he doesn't keep shy, I'll settle the whole thing with him with one blow. He'll never carry another message or cause the arrest of a man for priggling a watch, or crackin' a crib."

"I'd rather catch him and hold him somewheres till Sam could take him in hand."

"Oh, Jerusalem! wouldn't Nick just roast him! But, then, he might give us the slip. No; I'll blow him up with nitroglycerine or anything to get him out of the way."

"I'm with you—go ahead, old pard," said the other, and the two precious villains adjourned to the bar to strengthen their villainous resolutions with still more villainous whisky.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT WORK AGAIN.

Congratulating himself on having triumphed over his foes, Bob returned to the office as a telegraph messenger.

On his first trip to deliver messages, he carried one to Ned Grover, the detective.

"Hullo, Bob!" exclaimed the good-natured detective. "Got something for me this time?"

"Yes, sir; sign," replied Bob, laying his book and dispatch on the table before him.

"How goes it, Bob?" he asked, taking the book and signing his name to the line of his number.

"Lovely," answered Bob, taking the book and turning to leave.

"I say, come here a minute. I want to talk to you."

"What is it, sir?"

"I have reason to believe that Bowler's friends will try and get you out of the way before his trial comes off. You must watch everyone who comes about you, and see if you can find anybody watching or following you. If you get a message to deliver in one of the dark corners of the city, come and pick me up and I'll go with you."

"Yes, sir; I'll do it," said Bob, hurrying back to the office.

Two days later he called upon the detective at his office. "A man has been following me everywhere all day," he said.

"Eh, is that so?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; there he is across the street. That one with the plug hat on, looking over this way."

Detective Grover took a good look at the man.

"I don't know him, though his face looks quite familiar," he said. "You are armed, of course?"

"I have the pistols you gave me, sir."

"Keep them, and keep your eye on him. Don't let him get hold of you. If he attempts to do so, give him as many bullets as his skin will hold. I'll change my clothes, and watch him. So push ahead as soon as we get ready, and we'll see how it will end."

In a few minutes Ned Grover was ready, dressed as a loafer about town, and Bob hurried down the street again, followed by the detective.

Grover followed the man, who never lost sight of Bob, and saw him exchange signals with another as he passed. He recognized the second one as a regular Water Street character.

Bob returned to the office of the telegraph company, and, turning in his book, waited for another call to duty. The man hung around the front of the office, watching every messenger that came out.

At last Bob came out again, and started off on a run as fast as his heels could carry him. The man started in pursuit, with the disguised detective after him. It was quite dark, and the street lamps were being lighted up. Bob hurried across Broadway and on toward Chatham Square. He turned into a narrow street, where the lamps had not yet been lighted.

"I say, messenger," called the pursuer, softly, yet loud enough for Bob to hear him, "hold on; I want to see you."

"Keep back, sir!" cried Bob, wheeling and facing him. "Oh, you be hanged! Take that, you imp of—"

Crack! went Bob's pistol, and the glittering blade the villain held in his hand fell to the ground with a ringing sound.

His right arm was broken.

"Do you want another?" asked Bob, coolly aiming at the villain's head.

The man tried to draw a weapon with his left hand.

"Stop! I'll fire again!" said Bob. "Hold up your hands!"

A volley of oaths burst from the villain.

"Very good, Bob. Ha! ha! Very good!" laughed Ned Grover, running up to them. "You've bagged the rascal, I see."

"Yes, sir. He sprang at me with that knife there, but I was too quick for him."

"I saw it all—I am a witness to an attempt at murder. We'll get 'em all after awhile."

The man seemed stunned by the turn affairs had taken, and turning mechanically, he followed the detective to the station house. Grover preferred a charge of assault with intent to murder against him.

Bob delivered the message, and returned to the office, where he asked permission to go home.

The next day Captain St. Hillaire went to see the man whom the messenger had shot.

"Why, Dan!" he exclaimed, on seeing him, "did the messenger get away with you, too?"

"I'll throw up the sponge, cap'en," said Dan, mournfully. "He's too many for the gang, cap'en and all."

"The captain hasn't tried his hand on him yet."

"It makes no difference," said Dan; "it would end one way. We've waked up the wrong passenger."

"You mean the wrong messenger?" said St. Hillaire.

"All the same—passenger, or messenger—he has about busted the gang."

"What?"

"Busted the gang," quietly repeated Dan. "Here he's got three or four of us behind the bars, and—"

"That's true," muttered Captain St. Hillaire to himself, yet loud enough to be heard by Dan. "It has gone far

enough. I must put a stop to it. Sam shall settle with me when he gets out. Keep quiet, Dan, and I'll dispose of that troublesome kid within twenty-four or forty-eight hours."

Captain St. Hillaire left the hospital, where Dan was confined under guard with a broken arm, in no very pleasant frame of mind.

The next day a young man called on Ned Grover, the detective, and introduced himself as the nephew of Uriah Gibbs, from Iowa, saying:

"I have come to New York to investigate the mysterious disappearance of my uncle. You have been recommended to me as a very successful detective, and one that can be trusted. My name is John Gibbs. I want your services, for which I will pay you liberally."

"Certainly, Mr. Gibbs; I will be happy to serve you, sir."

"Of course, you know pretty much all the circumstances of my uncle's disappearance?"

"Yes, I believe I do. The papers have sifted the case pretty thoroughly; but I believe though, that I know more than the papers. Your uncle is dead, Mr. Gibbs."

"Dead?" gasped the young man, in well-feigned surprise.

"Yes. He was murdered on the night of his disappearance."

"The proof—the proof! Have you the proof of the murder?"

"I believe I have."

"Then I will give one thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the murderer."

"Thank you for the offer," said Grover, bowing politely. "I believe I will claim the reward, for I have the two murderers in the Tombs now."

"I will gladly pay it, sir. You have witnesses, or proof positive, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; an eye-witness to the murder, sir, who was himself nearly murdered on account of what he accidentally saw."

"I would like to see him, sir, and hear the particulars from him."

"He will be here at seven o'clock, by appointment, just an hour from now."

"I will wait then, if you have no objections."

"Just as you please. Take a seat, and make yourself at home."

At seven o'clock Bob entered the office. Ned had sent a private telegram to him while sitting at his desk.

"Bob," said the detective, "here is a gentleman just in from the West—a nephew of Mr. Uriah Gibbs—who has come here to engage my services in hunting up his uncle. Tell him where, and under what circumstances you saw him last."

Bob turned his eyes full on the stranger, and glared at him with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"You are the man who sat behind me at the theater one night, sir," he said, "and dropped a piece of paper in my lap, on which was written something about Bowler and Burgess being at Scott Harden's. I remember you, sir."

Both men sprang to their feet, glaring at each other like two tigers, each with a hand on their revolvers.

"It's false!" hissed the man, in a hoarse whisper.

"Surrender!" cried Ned, presenting his revolver at his breast.

"Never!" and the next instant the stranger had a brace of revolvers leveled at the detective.

"I've got the dead wood on you. Move an inch if you dare!" said Bob, leveling a pistol at him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF A VILLAIN.

With the young messenger's revolver aimed at his head, the daring St. Hillaire dared not move an inch. There was death in Bob Percival's eye, and the heroic detective was mad enough to do murder because he had been bamboozled by the wily villain in his business office.

"How is it?" he asked, in a hissing tone. "Do you surrender, or shall we open fire on—"

Crack! went St. Hillaire's pistol, and Ned Grover staggered back with a groan, his revolver falling harmlessly to the floor.

"That's my answer!" cried St. Hillaire, wheeling and firing at Bob so quickly that the latter hardly knew what had happened.

The villain's shot burnt his cheek. He threw out his hand toward him and pulled the trigger.

A sharp crack, and then St. Hillaire uttered a groan, a curse, then sank down to the floor.

"Goodness gracious!" Bob exclaimed, glaring at the prostrate man. "I believe I've killed him."

"Hope you have," said Ned; "for the rascal has nearly made worms' meat of me."

"Are you much hurt, sir?"

The blood was trickling down the side of the detective's face. Bob was alarmed.

"Water!" asked Ned, sinking into a chair.

Bob rushed for the hydrant, just as a policeman and a dozen men rushed into the room, attracted by the shots.

"Who fired those shots?" asked the policeman.

"Guess all three of us had a shot," replied Bob, coolly, giving Ned a drink of water.

"You are hurt, sir—ah, Ned Grover, is it you?" asked the officer, on recognizing the detective.

"Yes," said Ned, very pale. "I am hit, but I don't know how badly. Just send for the police surgeon and he'll find out."

It was not far to the surgeon's office. One of the men ran for him, while Bob told the story of the fight with the villain who lay dead on the floor.

"Who is he?"

"One of Sam Bowler's gang," answered Bob.

"What have you been up to now, Ned, old boy?" asked the burly police surgeon, pushing his way through the crowd to the side of the wounded detective.

"The old game, doctor," said Ned, as the surgeon proceeded to examine the wound.

"Just an inch lower," said the surgeon, "and the game would have ended by your throwing up your hands."

"Glad it wasn't any lower, then," said Ned, coolly.

"But how is it, anyhow, doctor?"

"Only a scalp wound; but I guess it was close enough to make your head swim—eh, old boy?"

"You're right, doctor; but I guess it didn't swim as much as his did, though."

"Ah! he's out of the game altogether," said the surgeon, looking around at the dead captain of the thieves. "You'd better come with me to the station, where I can dress your wound for you."

"I think I ought to arrest them, doctor," said the policeman to the surgeon, a little uncertain what to do under the circumstances.

"Report them as arrested, and I'll be responsible for Ned's appearance whenever he's wanted," said the surgeon. "And I will stand for Bob," added Ned, promptly.

Bob and Ned accompanied the surgeon to the station house, where they gave themselves up, technically, after relating the circumstances of the shooting. The officer at the detective's office took charge of the dead man's body, notified the coroner and the authorities. Bob confessed to having fired the fatal shot that caused his death, but on the plea of self-defence. Ned swore to having seen St. Hilaire shoot at Bob just a second before Bob shot him. Of course, there could be but one verdict in such a case. They were never even indicted by a grand jury, hence were never tried.

This exploit gave Bob a fame that caused him to be spoken of and pointed out as he passed through the streets of New York. It also cemented the friendship existing between himself and the daring detective to such an extent that he was persuaded to leave the office of the telegraph company and enter the service of Ned Grover.

"With a little more insight into the business, Bob, you will make a first-class detective," said Ned; "and I want to give you a fair chance to make yourself famous."

"And get my head blown off some night," said Bob, laughing.

"You might be a detective twenty years," said Ned, "and arrest a thousand law-breakers, without exposing yourself to as much personal danger as you have as a telegraph messenger in the last two months."

"That welt on your head doesn't look like it," and Bob laughed again. "But I'm not afraid to try it, anyhow."

So Bob became a detective, laid aside his uniform as a telegraph messenger, and formed a copartnership with the desperate, daring, fun-loving Ned Grover, the best detective in the United States. Of course, his fond mother opposed it, but Ned persuaded her into believing that he was exposed to more danger as a messenger boy than as a detective, and thus quieted her fears.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TELEGRAM.

"By all the shining stars, Bob," exclaimed Ned, one morning about two weeks after they had formed the copartnership, "Sam Bowler has escaped from the Tombs!"

"No!"

"Yes."

"How—when?"

"Last night!"

Bob gave a low whistle, very expressive of astonishment. He did not feel any better for the news, for he knew that

his worst enemy was once more free, to wreak a fearful revenge for the past.

"Well, what's to be done?" he finally asked of the more experienced detective.

"Catch him again," replied Ned. "What else can be done?"

"But can we do it?"

"We can try."

"Look out for a funeral," suggested Bob. "Sam is a bad citizen."

"Yes; too bad to be allowed to go free. I think we can find him in one of his old haunts."

"Dangerous job?"

"I know a former pal of his who will give him away on account of an old grudge against a woman down in Water Street; so you see, there will not be so much danger, after all."

Ned was right. Jealousy will sever the best of friends, and cause hate to rankle where love once reigned supreme. He hunted up the wretched relic of manhood who loafed around the barrooms in Water Street, and induced him to find out where Bowler was hiding and report to him. Of course, he was to receive a consideration for so doing.

Two days after he reported to Ned that Bowler was hiding in various places in the city, never sleeping two nights in the same place; that he was so thoroughly disguised that even his best friends failed to recognize him as he passed about through the city.

"How did you learn that?" Ned asked of the wretch.

"Through a pal of mine, who helped him to his disguise," he replied.

"That's getting it pretty straight, anyhow; here's ten dollars, keep your eyes peeled."

He took the money and departed.

"Bob, my boy," said Ned, when they were alone, "Bowler is in disguise, looking for one or both of us—you, more particularly, I guess. Be on the lookout for any stranger who approaches you. Don't let him rope you in, and do for you. You may get a dispatch, or a note, or something, telling you to meet me some place, where, if you go, you will be trapped and done for. Just remember, now, that if you get anything in the way of a note or message or anything in the way of writing from me, it will commence 'Dear Rob'—not Bob. If it commences 'Bob,' or 'Robert,' put it down that Bowler is there. You understand?"

"Yes," answered Bob.

"Don't forget it."

"I won't—I don't want to be jugged again."

With this understanding, Ned had little fears of Bob being captured by any of Bowler's crowd. Several days passed, and nothing more was heard of, or from the spy that Ned had employed. But, while at supper with his mother one night, a telegraphic message came for Bob. He hastily opened it, and read:

DEAR BOB—Meet me at Scott Harden's immediately. I've got Sam spotted. NED.

"Robert," said his mother in alarm, "don't go. There's danger there."

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"But I must, mother. If I failed him in a moment like this, Ned Grover, my best friend, would never forgive me. I will go by the headquarters, and get men enough to insure perfect safety."

Bob kissed his mother, and then hurried out of the house. Taking the street cars, he was soon at Ned's hotel, but the detective could nowhere be found.

"I wonder if Ned forgot the instructions he gave me, and wrote my name Bob instead of Rob, as he said he would?" muttered Bob to himself. "I'll make sure anyhow; and now, Mr. Sam Bowler, look out for yourself. If you are at the other end of this line you'll find a hook there, if you don't be spry."

Calling at the police office, he held a private conversation with the captain in charge, and obtained from him a half a dozen policemen to go with him in citizen's dress. With these he started off, and in a few minutes hove in sight of Scott Harden's place.

"Wait here," he whispered to the men. "I'll go in, you follow in about one minute."

Bob walked into the barroom in a careless, indifferent sort of way. There were two others in there, besides the proprietor. As soon as he entered, the door was hurriedly closed, and a low, triumphant chuckle greeted him.

Wheeling around, he found himself face to face with Sam Bowler.

"Ha, ha, ha! my young kid," laughed the desperado. "Ned nabbed, eh?"

"I should say you were," said Bob, drawing his pistol and leveling it at the villain's breast. "Do you surrender?"

"Surrender, the deuce!" roared Sam, in amazement. "What do you take me for?"

Crash! went the door, and the half-dozen policemen poured into the room, pistols in hand. Bowler knew how it stood then—knew that he had actually invited arrest, and made a desperate attempt to escape. He was overpowered, hurled to the floor, and disarmed and ironed. Only one of the others escaped.

"Nicely bagged, eh?" said Bob, as Bowler stood by.

"You will be, you spy!" hissed he, in impotent rage.

"I guess not," replied Bob. "Not by a great duffer like you! Why, Sammy, I knew your hand as soon as I got your dispatch. It said as plain as it could: 'Come down here and get me. I want to go back to the Tombs Hotel.'"

The officers roared with merriment, while Sam bit his lip in silence.

He was marched back to the Tombs and put in his old cell again, heavily ironed to insure safekeeping, and left once more to his reflections on the ways of evildoers.

This exploit gave Bob a splendid reputation, of which all the telegraph messengers in New York were justly proud. The thieves of the dark corners of New York began to regard him as one to be avoided by their class. They hated him, and many would gladly have put an end to him, could they have done so with any degree of safety to themselves. But Bob began to realize his danger, and was careful to avoid going into dangerous places alone. He knew that Bowler, Burgess, Cragan and the river thieves all had friends who would not hesitate to stick a knife into him when opportunity offered.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

The day of the trial of the murderers of Uriah Gibbs, Sam Bowler and Nick Burgess, found the two culprits in irons, and Bob, the young telegraph messenger, in spite of their efforts to do away with him, in court, ready to give the evidence against them. Like all other desperate thieves of the dark corners of New York, they were able to employ eminent counsel. By some kind of understanding of counsel for both sides, Nick Burgess was put on trial first.

Bob gave his testimony in a plain, straightforward manner, all of which was corroborated by the policeman whom the thieves beat so unmercifully after Bob made his escape from the window of the saloon. Several others corroborated him. But there were a host of witnesses for the defense, who swore wide of the truth in their eagerness to clear the prisoner. They were Water Street bummers. Their faces and records were against them, and the prisoner was found guilty.

Bowler and his friends were thrown into the greatest consternation by the verdict. He was confident he had witnesses enough, whose perjuries would be sufficient to clear Burgess and himself. But now he was utterly demoralized. The shadow of the gallows seemed to crawl across his pathway.

The next day his case was called, but Bob Percival could not be found. Ned Grover at once set to work to trace up the mystery of Bob's sudden and mysterious disappearance. He could find no clew whatever, and the end of the week found him still absent. The case was, at the urgent demand of the prosecuting attorney, adjourned another week.

Still he could not be found, and even the hopeful, buoyant Ned Grover began to despair. His mother, of course, suffered all the agonies of suspense that a mother's heart could endure.

The end of the second week found him still unaccounted for, so the trial had to go on without his evidence. Of course, nothing could be proved against the prisoner, and he was acquitted.

Bowler was jubilant.

He passed Ned on his way out and hissed in his ear:

"Your turn next, my fine fellow!"

"It's my turn now, sir," said Ned, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"I arrest you on this warrant, charging you with assaulting and robbing Uriah Gibbs."

Bowler started back with astonishment.

"It's false, sir!"

"It's true, every word of it!" cried Uriah Gibbs, himself, stepping forward and confronting the villain.

"Good heavens!" gasped the desperado, almost sinking to the floor in his fright; "it's Gibbs himself!"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Bowler," replied the old gentleman, tall, slender and pale, boldly confronting the wretch. "But it's no fault of yours that I'm alive and here. You and your pal tried to murder me—stabbed me in the back until thinking I was dead, and then threw me down into a well

or pit under the house. The fall restored me to consciousness. How I got out is no concern of yours. I went into the country to a friend, where I was safe from your villainous plottings, and recovered from my wounds. I stayed away from court, hoping you would be convicted and hung for the murder you tried to commit, knowing that my presence would save you from the gallows. But when I saw that you had made away with that poor boy, I came forward to keep you from getting off altogether."

This speech of the old gentleman created the most intense excitement in court.

Bowler was remanded to jail again to await another indictment by the grand jury, which was not long forthcoming.

The old man's story sounded like a weird romance, and it was in everybody's mouth.

On the day of the second trial of Bowler, Bob suddenly came into court, bareheaded and pallid—thin, almost, to a skeleton.

"I killed Mike Heddon, judge!" he cried out, "to make my escape from his den. They were going to kill me. I snatched his pistol and shot him dead—oh, heavens, there's Mr. Gibbs!"

"Yes, my young friend, it's me," he said, "and, like you, I escaped from the jaws of death."

Bob told his story in a few words. He had been induced to enter a carriage by the driver to go to the Grand Opera House; inside, he was seized, chloroformed, and carried to the notorious Mike Heddon's den, where he had been kept in terrible suffering until he had made his escape.

Bowler was convicted, and sent to the penitentiary for a long term. Burgess was relieved from the sentence of death by the re-appearance of Gibbs, but was tried and convicted on other charges, and sent up with Bowler.

Six months later Uriah Gibbs married Bob's mother, and set Bob up in fine style, always regarding him with affection; never forgetting his experience with him in "The Dark Corners of New York!"

THE END.

Read "THE STEPS OF DOOM: A TALE OF THE LANDS OF THE INCAS," which will be the next number (8) of "All Around Weekly."

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

What is believed to be the site of an ancient British village has been discovered on a hitherto undeveloped piece of land situated on a commanding hill to the north of the railway at Pokesdown, Bournemouth, England. The property, which for many years has lain covered with brambles, furze, heath, etc., has recently been cleared for building purposes, when the positions of two ancient barrows were clearly revealed. The smaller barrow contained a considerable quantity of burned flint and bone dust, and on a road being cut through the larger barrow many urns of great antiquity were unearthed, a few of them in a perfect state of preservation. They were what are known as sun dried, and belonged to the period before the Bronze or Iron Age, being probably some 3,000 years old.

Miss Isola Kennedy, daughter of John Kennedy, of Morgan Hill, near San Jose, was attacked and terribly mangled by a California lion near Glen Willis, on the Coyote Creek, while she was on an outing with two young men. The lion first sprang on one of the boys and then attacked Miss Kennedy, who fought him as best she could with a long hatpin. The boys ran to the camp of the Bay Cities Water Company near by and gave the alarm, and two men, John Conlon and Mr. Fletcher, hastened to the girl's aid. The former fired four times at the animal with a shotgun, and Fletcher fired three shots with a rifle into the animal before it succumbed. The girl's left arm was terribly mangled and her body lacerated. The neck of one of the boys was clawed and one of his ears split open.

Once in every three years the gymnasts of Switzerland and the members of the affiliated clubs in other countries—for the most part composed of Swiss residents abroad—meet to compete in the great contest known as the Federal Gymnastic Festival. A carefully prepared series of exercises is gone through on gymnastic apparatus; there is Swiss wrestling, and there are competitions in the national games of Switzerland, including throwing the stone (a forty-pound square block of granite). The festival closes with a display of combined extending exercises, in which all the competitors take part. This year at Lausanne there were 10,000 amateur gymnasts in the arena at Beaulieu going through these exercises simultaneously. As they were white with touches of color, the effect produced was extraordinary. Gymnastics are the national pastimes of the Swiss boys and young men, and the clubs they form are recognized and encouraged by the Federal Government.

Puget Sound, the many-branched inlet of the Pacific Ocean, which lies in the northwest corner of the State of Washington, is one of the most picturesque bodies of water in this country. Its shores, once densely wooded, have been denuded for the most part by the lumberman's ax, but the neighboring mountains offset this loss and afford a wonderful background to the scene. Although the natural beauties are many, nevertheless the treacherous waters of the Narrows, a contracted part of the sound which opens farther south into quiet bays and the ports of Olympia and Shelton, are feared by all who are acquainted with that locality. The reason is that the tides are extreme and their ebb and flow causes a rush of water through the Narrows. Twenty-five or thirty miles above the Narrows, in the upper reaches of the sound, the tides attain a height of twenty feet or more. Viewed from the shore, which is generally precipitous, the surging of the water as the tide sets in is magnificent, but this is the scene of many tragedies each year. Tremendous whirlpools are formed in the slender passage and rarely have rowboats and such small craft escaped when gripped in the swirling river. Even large steamboats creak and groan under the strain of breasting these twisting currents. The roar of the tides when running at full resembles the distant boom of the surf, and the sight is so fascinating that one forgets the cruel strength of the waves in their marvelous beauty.

RIB TICKLERS.

Young Softsmith—"Love levels all things," they say. Old Primm—All things but the head.

Wife—In a battle of tongues a woman can hold her own. Husband—My yes, p'raps she can; but she never does.

Wife—John, the hens have scratched up that egg plant seed you sowed. Hub—Darn 'em! Jealousy, I suppose.

"Remember, Ethel, you are a little girl and you shouldn't try to do all the talking." "When will I be old enough to, mamma?"

"It seems to me that I have seen you before." "You have, my lord. I used to give your daughter singing lessons." "Twenty years!"

Lawyer (to complaining client)—Well, have you at last decided to take my advice and pay this bill of mine? Client—Yes. Lawyer—Very well. (To clerk), Williams, just add two dollars to Mr. Smith's bill for further advice.

A tourist while travelling in the North of Scotland, far away from anywhere, exclaimed to one of the natives, "Why, what do you do when any of you are ill? You can never get a doctor." "Nae, sir," replied Sandy. "We've jist to dee a natural death."

He was excessively fond of dancing. Also he was very clumsy, and like a good many other people, he was fond of doing the thing he did worst. She, too, was excessively fond of dancing, with the difference that she was the personification of grace. But now she was suffering. Already he had torn her train with his ungovernable feet, and her dainty slippers bore the marks of his shoes. At last she could stand it no longer. "Let us sit out the rest of this dance," she suggested. "I am tired." He was reluctant. "I thought you said you could die waltzing," he said. "So I could," she replied, "but there are pleasanter ways of dying than being trampled to death."

THE MYSTERY OF A CROSS OF GOLD

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

The last rays of the sun were just vanishing from the western horizon.

I stood upon the veranda of a planter's residence not many miles from the city of New Orleans.

"Another day has passed, and still the mystery of a terrible crime is unsolved," I muttered.

I was at the time of which I am writing a New Orleans detective.

A most mysterious murder had been committed in the house where I was stopping.

The owner was a friend of mine by the name of Levantine—Gerald Levantine was his full name.

The victim of the assassin was "Old Seybert Levantine," as he was familiarly called, who was an eccentric old bachelor, and the elder brother of Gerald.

The day preceding the murder Morton Levantine, the adopted son of old Seybert Levantine, had returned home from New York, where he had been for two or three years attending a medical college.

It was the most puzzling case I ever knew of, this murder. There was no conceivable cause, no earthly motive for it, as far as we could discover.

Seybert Levantine had retired to his room in his brother Gerald's house, where he had made his home for ten years, just as usual.

In the morning a servant found him dead in his bed.

He had been stabbed to the heart.

It seemed that his death must have been instantaneous.

Seybert Levantine was not worth a dollar that was not so invested that no one would profit by his death save his legal heirs.

The murdered man had been a soldier in the Union army, and he received a pension from the Government that supported him.

He had a few hundred dollars saved up—not enough to tempt any one to kill him, though.

"Strange that so poor a man should have adopted a son?" the reader says.

It was strange, but it came about in this way:

One dark, stormy night, twenty-two years previous, as he was crossing the river in a small boat, Seybert Levantine came upon a drifting boat, in which was a little child—a boy three years old.

Seybert Levantine took the child home, and the little fellow won the affections of the entire household.

Gerald Levantine was only too glad to have Seybert adopt the boy, but he was very much surprised when his brother proposed to do so.

The reason why Gerald Levantine was astonished was simply because Seybert was a taciturn, morose man, who was never fond of children.

There was a mystery in his conduct that his brother could not comprehend.

Seybert Levantine's adopted son was called Morton Levantine.

Old Seybert had never manifested any particular affection for the boy.

All these particulars I learned from Gerald.

Suspicion pointed to no one as the guilty party, and for nearly two weeks I had been working in vain to find a single clue to the perpetrator of the cruel deed.

As I stood upon the veranda watching the sunset this particular evening, Gerald Levantine came out of the house and approached me.

In his hand he had a small carved wooden case.

"I have just made a discovery," Gerald said.

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

I was interested at once.

"Does it relate to the murder?"

"Yes; I have just discovered that a large cross of gold, which my brother for some reason treasured with the greatest care, and which he always kept in this case, is gone!"

"Describe to me that cross," I said quickly.

He did so.

"If I ever see it I shall recognize it," I said.

"Do you think the missing cross could have been taken by the assassin?" Gerald asked.

"Possibly, but not probably. An article of so little value would not be an incentive to the commission of so terrible a crime," I replied.

Gerald Levantine's information regarding the cross of gold suggested an entirely new idea to me.

There might be some mystery about the cross of gold, which, if solved, would lead to the solution of the mystery of the murder of Seybert Levantine.

This was the idea that came to me.

But I could not solve the mystery, if such there were, about the cross of gold without a clew any more easily than I could that of the murder itself.

Some weeks elapsed.

I had returned to New Orleans.

The murderer of Seybert Levantine, the newspapers said, would never be detected, and the editors were quite free to comment upon the worthlessness of the detectives.

This was the first case that had baffled me for a number of years, and I knew that a rival detective agency had been working night and day to get ahead of me in the solution of the mystery.

One day I accompanied a company of sportsmen on a duck-shooting expedition into the depths of the great salt marshes, in the midst of which the Malay settlements, which have been in existence for years, though seldom visited by white men, are situated.

I became separated from my companions, and finally the alarming conviction that I was lost forced itself upon my mind.

How long I wandered about aimlessly I do not know, but it must have been for hours.

Night was coming on rapidly, when I heard the sound of footsteps.

A moment later I came to an opening in the bushes, and, to my surprise, I saw one of our company—a man who was a comparative stranger to me, and whose name was Pierce Rocher—advancing to the door of a hut in the center of the clearing.

Presently a strange-looking old man, who a glance assured me was a Malay, came out.

I was about to rush forth, when something occurred that checked me.

From his pocket Rocher drew the cross of gold that Gerald Levantine had described to me.

I was sure it was the cross that was missing from the case of Seybert Levantine.

At the sight of the cross the old Malay uttered a startled cry and made a spring at the golden trinket.

Rocher hurled him back.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "Would you rob me?"

"No—no, but the cross—the cross! Where you get him?" the Malay asked.

"From my father!" answered Rocher.

"And your father's name?"

Rocher hesitated.

He was caught.

"You lie!" howled the Malay.

"No—no; I tell you the truth, but I do not know the name of my own father. Listen, old man; I was found drifting in a small boat on the river, when an infant, and the cross was over my neck."

"Why do you tell me this?" the Malay asked.

"Because I have found out the secret of the cross. It opens, and within it is a bit of parchment, upon which a cipher message is written, but I made out the following: '100,000 pounds.' The cipher relates to a fortune, perhaps my own, and in the cross is also your picture, old man, the terrible scar across your forehead and all. Since I discovered the secret of the cross I have been on the lookout for the original of that picture—yourself. I saw you enter your hut a few moments ago, and recognized you. Now, I suspect you can read this cipher; that you are in some way concerned in the mystery of the cross, or your picture would not be in it. If you will read for me that cipher, and aid me to gain possession of the fortune I suppose it contains the secret of, I'll reward you as you never dreamed of; I'll make you rich," said Rocher.

"The cipher tells the secret of a fortune, and it belongs to him upon whose neck that cross was placed when he was an infant. I can read the cipher, but I will not, because you are not the owner of that cross."

"You shall read it, or, by heavens, you die!" cried Rocher.

As he spoke he clutched the aged Malay by the throat and whipped out a dagger.

Silently as a shadow I stole up behind Rocher and dealt him a blow on the head that knocked him senseless.

Then I snatched the cross from him.

The old Malay sprang to his feet.

"Come with me," I said, "and I will show you the rightful owner of the cross of gold."

The Malay fixed his dark eyes upon my face, and for a moment he regarded me with a searching glance. Then he said:

"I will trust you. Come!"

He led me through the swamp until we reached the water-side.

Then we halted, and I hurriedly told the Malay the history of the cross as far as I knew it. Then he gave me the following explanation:

"Twenty-five years ago I was the trusted servant of an English merchant in the Philippine Islands. His name was Hardress—Stephen Hardress. He was a widower, with a little son, an infant. Business called Mr. Hardress to America, and before setting out he deposited with a banker an immense sum of money. I witnessed the delivery of the money, and saw my master write out an order, instructing the banker to deliver it to the bearer in case anything happened to him. Then he told the banker that I would be the party to present the order in case of accident to himself. The order was in cipher. The banker took a copy, and the original was inclosed with my picture in the cross of gold and suspended about his little son's neck. I should add that the banker kept a copy of my picture.

"We set out for New Orleans and arrived there in safety. I was left in the city while my master and his little son set out up the river to visit St. Louis.

"Mr. Hardress never came back, and I could never learn what his fate was, or that of his little son."

This was the Malay's story.

In the cross I found the order and the picture of the Malay. With him I hastened to New Orleans, intending to take him to see Morton Levantine next day.

That night, in the hotel parlor, I had seated myself in a deep window, where the curtain concealed my form, when Rocher and a handsome young lady entered the room.

The first words of their conversation fixed my attention.

"It's all right, Mag," said Rocher. "Undoubtedly Morton Levantine is the heir to the mysterious fortune mentioned in the cipher in the cross of gold. I have lost the cipher and the cross, but I have found the Malay, the original of the picture, and he assured me that the owner of the cross was entitled to a fortune.

"Now, it is very lucky you met Morton Levantine in New York, and that he has fallen in love with you. Go right on. Play your part. Become his wife, and then he shall die. The cross, I have reason to believe, is in the hands of one who will give it to him. When he has secured the fortune, we will insure his funeral, and you will inherit as his wife. Then we will leave the country and enjoy the money."

"Excellent!" replied the lady. "By the way," she went on. "I expect Morton Levantine here to-night. I received a message saying that he was coming to attend the reception given to the governor at this hotel this evening."

"Then lead him on to offer you his hand in marriage. We must not fall now—I have risked too much. From the time when, in a moment of drunken confidence, old Seybert Levantine told me of the golden cross, and how he expected to realize a fortune through it and the boy Morton, I determined to possess that fortune myself. I killed Seybert Levantine, and if you fail me, girl, I'll kill you!"

The last words were hissed fiercely.

"Never fear—I will not fail," was the young woman's answer.

The secret was out, and I had the mystery solved.

Half an hour later, as he was leaving the hotel, I arrested Mr. Rocher and lodged him in prison.

I then returned to the hotel in full dress for the reception. I was about to enter a small parlor on the second floor of the hotel, when I saw Morton Levantine and the young woman called Mag.

The young man's arm was about the false woman's waist, and her head rested upon his shoulder, and when I entered the room.

I strode up to the pair.

"Morton Levantine, that woman is the accomplice of the assassin of your foster-father," I said.

The woman sprang away and attempted to leave the room, but I placed her under arrest at once.

Then, in a few words, I gave the young man an explanation of the case.

It was a surprise to the youth, who was really infatuated with Rocher's beautiful accomplice, but when he knew all, his love was changed to abhorrence.

The scoundrel Rocher was convicted of the murder of Seybert Levantine, in due time, and punished in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The fortune left by Morton's father with the banker in the Philippine Islands was eventually recovered, and he did not forget to reward me well for the part I had played in detecting the assassin of his foster-father, and recovering the cross of gold.

This strange experience of mine might well have furnished material for a large work of fiction, but I have briefly given you the sum and substance of the case, from which you see that, in our profession, we frequently meet with practical illustrations of the fact that truth is stranger than fiction.

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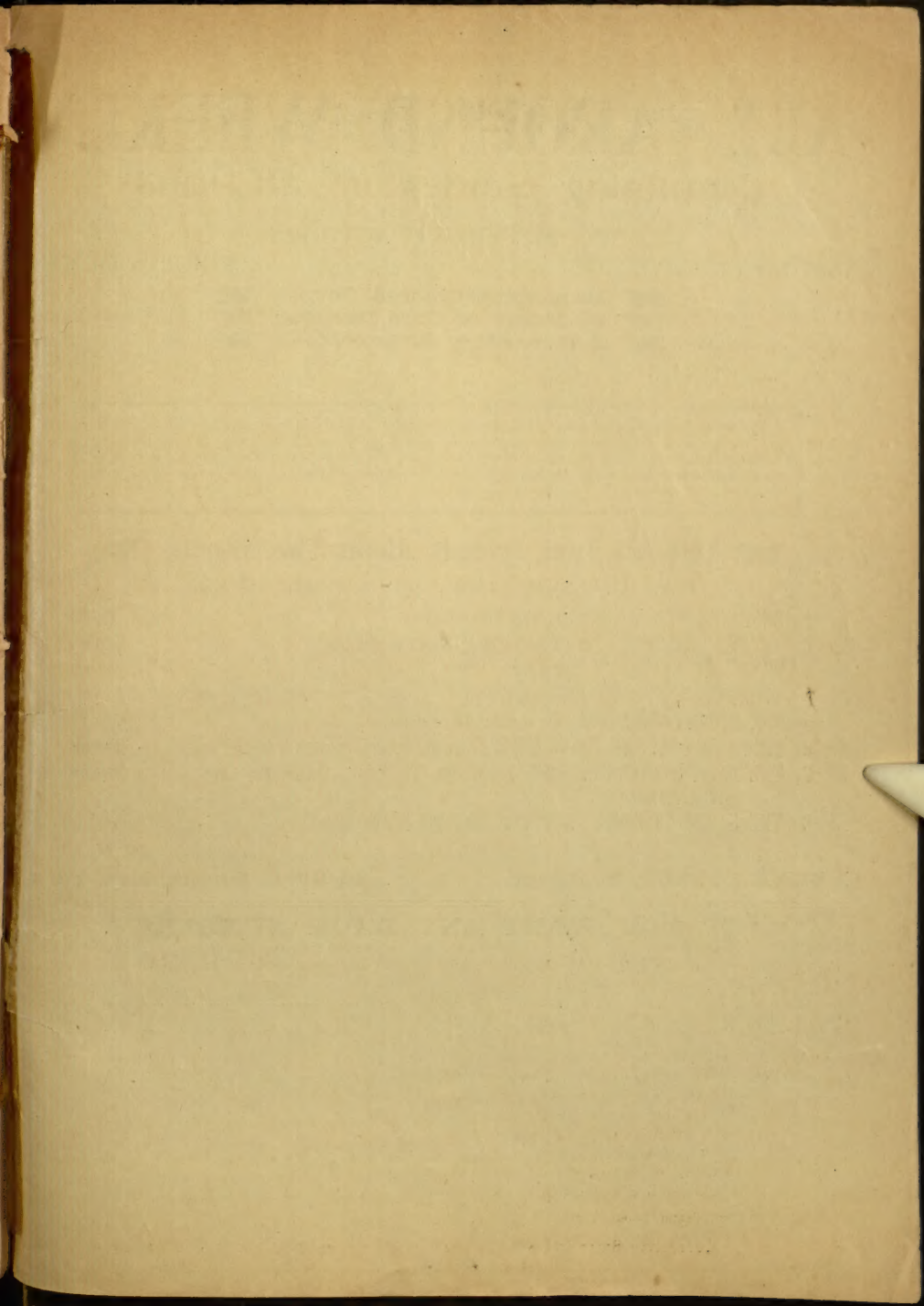
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